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The Development of H. G. Wells's Conception of the Novel, 1895 to 1911

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Abstract

In his writing on the nature and purpose of the novel between 1895 and 1911, Wells endorses artistic principles for their social effects. His public lecture on “The Contemporary Novel,” written in 1911 in response to a debate with Henry James, is the most lucid articulation of his artistic principles, and his later autobiographical reflections on the debate obscure the clarity of the earlier version. Wells’s artistic principles emerge in his reviews of contemporary fiction for the *Saturday Review* (1895–1897), where he extends Poe’s concept of “unity of effect” to the novel and justifies his preference for social realism with a theory of cultural evolution. His views develop further in the context of sociological and philosophical debates between 1901 and 1905. Wells commenced the century with a sceptical view on the social effects of literature, but his exposure to British Pragmatism encouraged him to revive the principles developed in his reviewing. The view on Wells’s conception of the novel presented in this thesis challenges the prevailing view that he began his career with a set of purely artistic principles, adding sociological and intellectual apparatus after the turn of the century.

The work comprising this thesis is entirely the author's own. It has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

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Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to examine the development of H. G. Wells's conception of the novel, his artistic preferences in the novel, his statements of the novel's nature and purpose, and his attempts to explain the relationship between imaginative literature and other forms of experiencing and knowing the world. The thesis provides readings of Wells's review criticism, which he wrote for the *Saturday Review* as head fiction reviewer between March 1895 and April 1897, as well as sociological, historical, and philosophical writings composed in the first five years of the new century, including *Anticipations* (1901) and *Mankind in the Making* (1903), lectures on "The Discovery of the Future" (1902) and "Scepticism of the Instrument" (1903), and a paper on "The So-Called Science of Sociology" (1905), each of which presents a different aspect of Wells's thought on the relationship between imaginative literature and other fields of knowledge. I provide a comparative reading of Wells's public lecture on "The Contemporary Novel," which I argue presents the clearest articulation of his conception of the novel's qualities and purpose, with autobiographical reflections on the debates that influenced his thinking in a section of his *Experiment in Autobiography* (1934). My argument is that these texts, from the reviews for the *Saturday* to "The Contemporary Novel," represent a deep continuity in Wells's thinking on the nature and purpose of the novel, and that the conception of the novel that emerges from the reviews is the same as the one that animates the 1911 lecture.

The conclusion that Wells's conception of the novel is consistent between 1895 and 1911 modifies the view presented in existing commentary upon the development of his career. The key text is Gordon Ray's "H. G. Wells Tries to Be a Novelist" (1959). Ray defends Wells against the view that whatever he achieved as a writer, he was never a novelist "in the high sense in which it was used by James and Conrad when they set out as conscious literary artists to make the novel the equal of the other great literary forms" (106). True enough, Wells had emerged from a debate with Henry James on the functions of the novel, a year before James's death in 1916, asserting in correspondence he "had rather be called a journalist" than an artist, receiving by return post James's famous rejoinder: "It is art that *makes* life, makes interest, makes importance" (Edel and Ray 264, 267). The statements clearly put Wells and James at odds.¹ But Ray shows convincingly that Wells, in his

¹ See Chapter 1 for my discussion of the debate.

reviewing for the *Saturday*, developed a “solid and creditable” conception of the novel, combining “thoroughly traditional” principles with a preference for social realism of the kind he encountered in the novels of Turgenev and Hardy, an “insistence on representing great social issues through individual histories,” a conception that formed the basis of his artistic practice until 1911 (Ray 118). The novels Wells wrote between 1899 and 1910 were “the real thing,” but he later turned to the “Novel of Discussion,” allowed characters to engage in lengthy disquisitions upon topics not always clearly related to a book’s theme, made “a series of perverse disavowals of artistic intent,” and “came to take a kind of pleasure in insisting that he was a journalist and a philistine, interested only in getting on with the world’s work in a rough-and-ready way” (Ray 107, 122, 157).² In sum, Ray’s claim is that Wells adopted a conception of the novel in his reviewing for the *Saturday* that not only yielded the artistic objectives for the following decade or so; it was free of the kinds of utilitarian preoccupations that defined his career after 1910.

It is the latter part of this claim that this thesis aims to challenge. For the continuity of concern that characterises Wells’s reflections on the nature and purpose of the novel between 1895 and 1911 is based on his attempt to integrate aesthetic and sociological objectives for the novel.³ What Ray’s argument overlooks is that Wells justifies his preference for social realism, in his reviews for the *Saturday*, by linking his endorsement of certain formal and structural qualities, especially forms of narrative perspective responsible for depicting the effect of “social issues” upon “individual histories,” with a broader, instrumental or functional view on the relationship between art and social progress. In Chapter 3, I show that Wells based his artistic preferences upon a theory of cultural evolution that is original with Wells, which he worked out at the same time he was writing for the *Saturday* (in some cases, worked out in the *Saturday*’s pages), and I suggest that from the start, he was concerned with the kinds of social outcomes that critics have typically found not only to characterise but to derogate his fictional output after 1910, as I proceed to explain below. In other words, Ray’s attempt to defend Wells as a novelist true and proper is based on the premise that he started

² The titles of Wells’s “real” novels are *Love and Mr. Lewisham* (1900), *Kipps* (1905), *Tono-Bungay* (1909), and *The History of Mr. Polly* (1910).

³ Although I refer from time to time to texts beyond 1895–1911, I focus on this period in order to conform to the chronological constraints of Ray’s study, but also because Wells’s later pronouncements on the scope of the novel, for example “The Novel of Ideas” (1940), present no advance on the 1911 formulation in “The Contemporary Novel.” See p. 23 note 35 below for details on “The Novel of Ideas.”

from a position of purely artistic interests.⁴ It is the burden of this thesis to show that this premise misrepresents not only the nature of Wells's early fiction reviewing, but the relationship between the conception of the novel emerging in the reviews and the development of similar ideas through the following decade and a half, culminating in the concise formulation of "The Contemporary Novel."

The consensus view, alluded to in Ray's finding that Wells renounced the title of novelist in favour of journalist or philistine, is that a watershed divides his career in two. The view emerged not long after the fateful date, 1910, when Wells ceased to write, to use Ray's term, "real" novels, turning instead to the discussion novel; the claim, as David Lodge puts it in a 1967 article, is that Wells betrayed his imagination ("Assessing" 56). Contemporary critics of Wells struggled to articulate the relationship between his artistic and extra-artistic, functional, sociological or intellectual ambitions in favourable terms. As early as 1915, Van Wyck Brooks found Wells, who interprets life "in the light of ideas rather than in the light of experience," to be "an 'intellectual' rather than an artist" (*The World of H. G. Wells* 153). Wells's objective, Brooks discerns, is not to write good novels; it is to alter society: "the spirit of unrest in Wells is to be appeased by working through the established fact, by altering the environment in which man lives, contributing in this way to the ideal of a great society of which personal character is at once the essence and the product" (154). Brooks recognised that the kind of conception of the novel that Ray identifies in the reviews, one depicting the relationship between individual and social forces, took on greater than aesthetic significance in Wells's hands. And Brooks's adverbial qualification "rather than" was not peculiar. In "Impressions" of Wells written in 1920, St. John Ervine found whatever was of artistic merit in Wells's writing was more an accident of mental endowment than a deliberate choice. Wells "is extraordinarily indifferent to literary style," prefers a clumsy sentence to a "shapely" one, "and so far as one can discover, does not spend a single second on 'finding the right word'" (127) But: he "can no more elude artistry than he can refrain from thinking" (127). Wells is a

⁴ His finding begs the question of what kind of realism Wells's view represents. Anderson, for example, identifies two contending versions of realism contemporary with Wells: "In the debates at the end of the nineteenth century about realism two contrasting views of art emerge. The one attempted to posit some direct correlation between the novel and moral and social attitudes and it implied at its most profound the belief that literature, instead of having its own categories of value and implication, was part of a larger totality. The other, of which realism was an important expression, led towards a new role for the artist and the derivation of independent, asocial values for art" (*Bennett, Wells and Conrad* 4). I suggest that Wells belongs to the former camp, and show what kind of "larger totality" he conceived art to be part of.

man “possessed of artistry,” which seems a polite way of saying he does not know what he is doing (127). J. B Priestley would similarly find Wells to be an artist despite attempts to achieve the kinds of social effects Brooks had defined as Wells’s overriding objective. Wells is a writer “strenuously endeavouring to hide his light under the bushel of severe moral earnestness,” Priestley writes, foreshadowing Ray on the contrast between Wells’s artistic principles and his repudiations of artistic aspiration, and finding Wells’s intellectual ambitions to diminish the quality of his novels as time goes by (90). Wells “is a trinity of persons”: he is “the scientific romancer” of *The Time Machine* (1895), *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896), and *The Invisible Man* (1897); “the creative comic genius” of *Kipps* (1905) and *The History of Mr. Polly* (1910); but mostly he is “the sociologist who is always crying out upon ‘This waste! This muddle!’ and who is always wasting our patience and muddling his novel in the process” (90). Priestley finds Wells’s intellectual ambitions to have proven incompatible with artistic quality: he “deliberately elected to be a good popular preacher instead of the great novelist he might have become, being blind, it would appear, to the fact that there is more truth, beauty, and goodness implicit in great art than are expressed in all the moral homilies since the world began” (89). What one finds in Brooks and Priestley is a grudging acceptance that Wells is, however inadvertently, a novelist, along with rejection of the socio-moral, intellectual objectives of his artistic practice. Priestley’s view in particular suggests a decline: Wells evolved from romancer to comic genius, then entered a declining phase, became a sociologist, spoiled his novels in the attempt to alter society.

Anthony West, in a short but influential article printed two years before Ray’s study of Wells’s *Saturday* reviewing, reprises the quasi-psychological account of Wells’s artistic split personality found in Ervine and Priestley. Classifying Wells’s works into those that say things Wells really believed and those that merely “say things Wells wishes to believe,” West proposes 1899 as the decisive year in Wells’s career: everything from *Love and Mr. Lewisham* on is “ill-considered and confused,” and intellectually “forced” (A. West 56). This is a more restricted view of Wells’s artistic achievements than that allowed by Ray, and is based on West’s view of Wells’s decision to embark on a series of speculative sociological essays in 1901, with the publication of *Anticipations*, a book comprising, in Wells’s words, a “forecast of the way things will probably go in this new century” (*Anticipations* 1). West finds the book not true to Wells but merely “Wellsian,” marking the moment Wells decided to try to be an optimist and, setting the mode for subsequent work, commencing a decades-long betrayal of his literary imagination (A. West 56). A book-length study of the scientific romances by

Bernard Bergonzi advances a similar thesis. One must “modify the customary view of Wells as an optimist,” Bergonzi notes in an introductory chapter: “The dominant note of his early years was rather a kind of fatalistic pessimism, combined with intellectual scepticism” (*Early H. G. Wells* 22). Finding Wells’s sceptical attitude to define his best work (Bergonzi focuses on the scientific romances, from *The Time Machine* of 1895 to *The First Men in the Moon* of 1901), he suggests Wells’s work began to decline when he turned from romances and novels to prophetic, sociological writings in the wake of the success of *Anticipations*. Following West, *Anticipations* is likewise a watershed moment for Bergonzi, the moment one finds Wells “ceasing to be an artist and beginning his long career as publicist and pamphleteer” (20–21). Bergonzi is perhaps more palpably disappointed with his subject who, “at the beginning of his career, was a genuine and original imaginative artist, who wrote several books of considerable literary importance, before dissipating his talents in directions which now seem more or less irrelevant” (22). West and Bergonzi are clear on where the blame for Wells’s increasing irrelevance lies: it is in his decision to become a social reformer, one that saw him relinquish artistic principles for intellectual ambitions, at the expense of his significance as a novelist.

An alternative viewpoint on Wells’s intellectual ambitions exists, although it is restricted to comments from his friends and fellow novelists before 1910, posthumous remarks that, under the circumstances, should be taken in the eulogistic vein in which they were intended, and backhanders. Of the latter, there is Ford Madox Hueffer’s view, that Wells’s intellectual influence surpassed that of any of his contemporaries: “The most intellectually influential figure in England at the present day is that of Mr. H. G. Wells” (“Critical Attitude” 666). The remark appears in the context of an article in which Hueffer says that trying to be influential intellectually is a bad thing for an artist.⁵ Joseph Conrad told Wells in a letter that Wells’s influence over the younger generation had taken the form of “a sort of mental devotion”: “I have seen and heard enough of it to know it well. You get hold of them by your gentleness, your persuasiveness by your extraordinary accessibility—and that utter absence of superior pose No one *can* be more honest intellectually” (Karl and Davies 128). And it was for the intellectual effect of his works that Wells’s contemporaries best remembered him upon his death. The critic and journalist Desmond MacCarthy conceded no writer

⁵ See Chapter 1, pp. 23–31 for a discussion of Hueffer’s article and the *English Review*, which Wells helped Hueffer (later Ford Madox Ford) get off the ground in 1908, and the vicissitudes of his relationship with Hueffer, which petered out in bickering over money.

“contributed more to the moral and intellectual make-up of the average twentieth-century man and woman,” whether they were conscious of it or not (*Memories* 138). Similarly, Kingsley Martin: “We should hazard a guess that no writer in this century has so deeply influenced his generation” (115). But the view that Wells enjoyed special influence over the minds of his contemporaries does not address the question of the relationship between his ambitions as an intellectual or a social reformer and his practice as a novelist.⁶

Such are the stakes of distinguishing in this dualistic manner between the artistic and the instrumental objectives of Wells’s career. However, despite its impressive critical pedigree, the general claim presented by Ray, West, and Bergonzi, that Wells’s career commenced from a position characterised by purely artistic interests, later declining to a utilitarian attitude giving priority to social objectives over aesthetic ones, is misleading, and it is the objective of this thesis to demonstrate the way in which it is misleading. Put simply, Wells’s utilitarian preoccupations are present throughout the period 1895–1911, including in his early fiction reviewing for the *Saturday*, in which Ray identifies the formulation of his conception of “the novel proper” (“Wells Tries” 109). In no phase in his career did Wells present an ideal for the novel based exclusively on aesthetic criteria. In all his explicit

⁶ Indeed to commend Wells for his intellectual influence is almost to imply there is little to say in favourable terms about the preponderance of his creative output; furthermore, the record reveals a general decline in estimations of his intellectual value. George Orwell would doubt “whether anyone who was writing books between 1900 and 1920, at any rate in the English language, influenced the young so much,” but found Wells’s “singleness of mind, the one-sided imagination that made him seem like an inspired prophet in the Edwardian age, makes him a shallow, inadequate thinker” in 1941; Orwell adopted the prevailing view that after 1910 (he identifies 1914 as the turning point) Wells “squandered all his talents in slaying paper dragons” (143, 145). (For a discussion of Orwell’s response to Wells, see John S. Partington, “The Pen as Sword: George Orwell, H. G. Wells and Journalistic Parricide,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 39 (2004): 45–56.) Wells’s intellectual ambitions secured a greater audience for his sociological and historical writing, but not for his novels. Bloom finds that Wells’s wartime novel *Mr. Britling Sees It Through* (1916) briefly revived his flagging reputation but that Wells “had essentially no audience for his fiction” after 1911 (4). The “astounding success of *The Outline of History*,” Wells’s monumental world history published 1919–20, introduced him to “the largest audience he ever had, but it also helped to fix his identity as a sage rather than a novelist” (4). See Skelton 238–39 on sales of the *Outline*. The effect was such that by 1931, when the *Saturday Review* ran a competition offering ten guineas for a list of the best one hundred books of all time, the judge remarked on the winning entry, in which *The Outline of History* appeared at number ninety-eight, that “Wells, I regret to state, has been admitted to the select company on the strength of his historical writing rather than as a story teller” (“‘Saturday’ Competitions New Series—XXXIII” 768–70). A low point in Wells’s reputation is surely F. R. Leavis’s use of the name “Wells” as a derogatory epithet. In his 1962 Richmond Lecture on Charles Snow’s 1959 Rede Lecture on “The Two Cultures,” in which Snow lamented the apparent separation of intellectual life into regrettably autonomous scientific and literary camps, Leavis describes Snow as “the spiritual son of H. G. Wells” and means it to be no compliment, remarking upon Snow’s “crass Wellsianism” and naive “Neo-Wellsian assurance” in his enthusiasm for the scientific revolution and technocracy (*Two Cultures?* 21, 23, 27).

reflections on the nature and purpose of the novel, he consistently attempts to integrate, on the one hand, the artistic principles for which critics (simultaneously regretting the later expiration of these principles) commend him and, on the other hand, the kinds of socio-moral objectives for which he is condemned. My account of the development of Wells's conception of the novel challenges Ray's view that the ideal for the novel that emerges in Wells's reviewing for the *Saturday* is free of the kinds of social, moral, or intellectual motives that characterise his decline, as well as the view put forward by West and Bergonzi that Wells's overtly sociological writings from 1901 are responsible for his vanishing into other kinds of writing and declining to a more utilitarian approach to imaginative literature. Indeed, the finding that the vocation of socio-moral reformer is contrary to success as a novelist glosses over Wells's efforts to defend his artistic choices and preferences in terms of social objectives outside of purely artistic concerns from the start. It is my contention that a reconstruction of Wells's defence of the novel between 1895 and 1911 raises significant challenges for the existing consensus.

I have ordered my chapters in a kind of reverse chronology in order to deal first with the question of which text represents Wells's most detailed and compelling formulation of the function of the novel. In Chapter 1, I argue that the 1911 public talk on "The Contemporary Novel" is his best formulation. I justify this claim by examining the debate, which took place mostly in personal correspondence, between Wells and Henry James over the nature and purpose of the novel, and by comparing Wells's argument in 1911 to the later autobiographical reflections usually cited by critics as containing the definitive account. In the 1911 talk Wells defends the novel as "a study of the association and inter-reaction of individualised human beings" and "the only medium through which we can discuss the great majority of the problems which are being raised . . . by our contemporary social development," presenting an ideal for the novel in terms of its unique capacity to engage critically with socio-moral ideas (869). I show how this sociological conception of the novel relates to contemporary debate over the possibility of social engagement in art. And I address the question of Wells's later repudiations, his rejection of the title of "novelist" in favour of "journalist," and his attempt, in his autobiography, to reassess the conditions within which his formulation developed. I find that though Wells's conception of the novel has not changed by 1934, his renunciatory strategies and attempts to blur generic distinctions between fiction and biography impair the value of his autobiographical reflections as an account of the development of his conception of the novel.

Having identified “The Contemporary Novel” to represent Wells’s most lucid formulation, in Chapter 2 I examine the development of his thoughts on the nature and purpose of the novel in the context of his increasing involvement, in the wake of the publication of *Anticipations*, with contemporary sociological and philosophical debates. Although *Anticipations* commences with Wells’s rejection of fiction as a means of social analysis, a kind of methodological dualism of science and art, this feature of his thought has received no detailed attention. In a reading of “The Discovery of the Future,” I argue that the figurative structure of Wells’s exposition undermines his claim for a rigorous dualism between literature and science, and sets the path for his abandonment of the sceptical, dualistic position, in *Mankind in the Making*. These texts brought him to the attention of contemporary sociological, political-economic, and academic philosophical cohorts, to the attention of Graham Wallas and Sidney and Beatrice Webb, to an audience at a Royal Institution Friday Evening Discourse, and to a group of Oxford philosophers including the leading British Pragmatist F. C. S. Schiller. I show how Wells’s exposure to and involvement in contemporary currents of thought, in particular his discovery of a philosophical kindred spirit in Schiller, encouraged him to abandon the scepticism of *Anticipations* and to develop an argument defending imaginative literature as the best medium for exploring the relationship between individuals and socio-moral forces.

This conception of the novel, based upon a synthesis of aesthetic and functional ideals, first emerges in Wells’s reviewing for the *Saturday*, which I examine in Chapter 3. Here he demonstrates a preference, first identified by Ray, for the social realist novel of the kind Wells encountered in novels by Turgenev and the Norwegian Jonas Lie. Describing it as “the novel of types,” Wells formulates an ideal for the novel based on the depiction of the interaction between characters and social forces, in which “individuals” are shown “living under the full stress of this great social force or that” (“Novel of Types” 23–24). I show that Wells justifies his preference for the social novel on two grounds. First, he extends to the novel the concept of “unity of effect,” a mainstay of the literary criticism of Edgar Allan Poe, using it to endorse the use of certain kinds of narrative perspective which Wells finds best suited to the depiction of the working of social forces on individuals. The extension of Poe’s concept of “unity” is a crucial feature of Wells’s critical approach, but it has been entirely overlooked by existing accounts of Wells’s conception of the novel. Second, I examine the relationship between the development of Wells’s defence of the “novel of types” and a theory of social evolution that he worked out in a series of scientific articles between 1893 and 1895. Wells’s preoccupation

with social evolution was of its time: the formulation of such theories “lay at the heart of the sociological enterprise” among writers on the subject around the turn of the century, when sociology “was committed to a search for the laws of social development” (Collini, *Liberalism and Sociology* 206–07). But two aspects are unique to Wells. The first is his argument that Darwinian natural selection plays no part in social development or progress; in Wells’s view, social evolution is an intellectual matter, operating through critical engagement with socio-moral ideas. His attempt to use this theory as the basis for understanding how novels were to achieve tangible, constructive social effects is the other unique aspect of his model. It is also in the later stages of his tenure at the *Saturday* that Wells adopts the sceptical attitude toward the possibility of constructive social engagement in fiction that leads to the methodological dualism of *Anticipations*. The path that leads from the reviews to the mature conception formulated in “The Contemporary Novel,” the transition from scepticism about the social efficacy of fiction to his revival of the social-aesthetic synthesis of his reviewing, are features of Wells’s development that receive little attention in existing accounts, and it is to an understanding of these developments that this thesis provides a contribution. In Chapter 4, I examine the relationship between Wells’s social-aesthetic conception of the novel and his own fictional practice in readings of narrative episodes in *The Island of Dr. Moreau* and *Kipps*.

Throughout, I show Wells’s arguments for social objectives in the novel, his synthesis of sociological and aesthetic notions, operated consistently under the same assumptions and premises. The phrase quoted above from his lecture on “The Contemporary Novel,” that the novel is “the only medium” equipped to address questions of contemporary social development, is characteristic (869). His pronouncements on the functions of the novel consistently focus on what is unique to fiction, premising social effects upon these unique qualities. The novel is to interrogate “political questions and religious questions and social questions,” but not in the way a sociopolitical or philosophical tract might: as I show in Chapter 1, Wells argues that the novel, unique even among literary genres, has its own “power of veracity” in making these “questions” resonate in readers’ minds; it is a “vehicle of understanding” aiming at increasing “the range of understanding” among its readers (871–73). This is a direct development of the claim, in a lecture Wells read to the Oxford Philosophical Society in late 1903 and which I examine in Chapter 2, that politics and morals are at bottom kinds of “self-expression” in the sense that they reveal the relation between an individual personality and social realities and ideals, and that one may respond “sympathetically” to the “notes” of the personal politics and morals of others in much the

same way one responds to a piece of music or a poem (“Scepticism of the Instrument” 391–92). This argument developed from Wells’s defence of his preference for the social novel or “novel of types” in the *Saturday Review*, his extension of Poe’s concept “unity of effect” to the novel, and his preference for the presentation of a subjective, individual “standpoint” or perspective in fiction. The conception of the novel Wells develops in the *Saturday* is based on the premise that certain kinds of narrative perspective produce specific sociological effects, representing the relationship between individuals and social forces—what he later refers to in “The Contemporary Novel” as a discussion of the questions of contemporary social development. No new ground is broken by alleging that Wells admired the social novel; Ray examines this aspect of Wells’s conception in detail.⁷ But examining the relationship between Wells and Poe raises questions of the relationship between formal techniques and social objectives in the novel not touched in existing accounts. In particular, it shows that Wells was at pains at the start of his career to define artistic objectives in terms of social effects, and vice versa. Wells may have declined as a novelist some time after he wrote “The Contemporary Novel,” but this is not because his conception of the nature and purpose of the novel changed. He did not at some point in his career decline to a model assimilating sociological to aesthetic notions; he started with one. Such a finding suggests that the relationship between Wells’s utterances on, and his practice of, his chosen craft might benefit from closer analysis.

⁷ See Ray, “H. G. Wells Tries” 112–15, and pp. 1–2 above.

1

The Constructive Moment: The Wells–James Debate and “The Contemporary Novel”

In this chapter I argue that the critical account of Wells’s various public pronouncements on his conception of the relation between artist and society is inconsistent. In particular, there is disagreement among critics over whether a 1911 lecture on the “Contemporary Novel” or a section of his 1934 autobiography headed “Digression About Novels” is the definitive formulation.¹ I suggest “The Contemporary Novel” represents Wells’s best formulation of his thoughts on the relations of artist and society. I argue that by overlooking some important contextual features, including the timing of Wells’s lecture during ongoing correspondence with Henry James about technique, other writing by James on his aesthetic practice and thoughts about art, and articles published in the *English Review* by J. A. Hobson and Ford Madox Hueffer, fundamental similarities between the two accounts have been obscured—even by Wells who, reprising the issue almost a quarter-century later, ties himself in knots in his autobiographical reconstruction. By taking these and other matters of context into account in the first three sections of this chapter, I suggest that “The Contemporary Novel” should be read not as a statement of artistic “method” as that term is typically understood, but as an attempt to strike an equilibrium between aesthetic and socio-moral values in art, and that the question of method is actually a side issue for Wells.² While I explore his sociological interventions in more detail in Chapter 2, here I show how Wells’s attempt, in “The Contemporary Novel,” to balance his artistic and social agendas fits within contemporary debates about the possibility of an intellectual role for artists, whether art should be kept free from “external” problems such as social and political questions, or whether it could have, or should have, constructive consequences on forms of social organization. In the last three sections of this chapter, I compare “The Contemporary Novel” with the “Digression About Novels.” I assess three of Wells’s strategies in argument there and in his correspondence and other writings: a strategy of repudiation, in which he

¹ See note 36 below for a summary of existing criticism on this issue.

² This means I disagree with the tendency of Wells’s critics to read him as discussing literary “method” or “technique” as conventionally understood. See my discussion, pp. 44–46 below.

denies an interest in “the Novel as an art form” altogether; a differentiating strategy, in which his positive arguments about the novel suffer when taken out of context; and a rhetorical strategy in his later formulations that, tending toward evasion of fundamental questions about his substantive claims for novel-writing, leads him into self-contradiction. In particular, I show that the central metaphor Wells uses in the “Digression” to explain his position, the metaphor of the “splintering frame,” has been misread, with the result that his own account of his art has been misunderstood. My conclusion is that the 1911 lecture is the best argued case for a constructive conception of the novel, and the faults of the “Digression” testament to the importance of careful reconstruction of the local debates informing Wells’s socio-political writing. In Chapter 3 I show that Wells had begun to develop the conception of the novel he defends in “The Contemporary Novel” in his fiction reviewing for the *Saturday Review* between 1895 and 1897.

The cheap and the easy

At the beginning of 1911, Wells sent a copy of *The New Machiavelli*, fresh from the Bodley Head press after serialisation in *The English Review*, to Henry James’s Sussex house. James was in Boston at the time but, alerted to the gift by his English housekeeper, he thanked Wells in a letter of 3 March, admitting he had already read the book in the American edition (Edel and Ray 126). He had found the “first half” of the book, dealing with the protagonist’s upbringing and marriage, praiseworthy—“so alive and kicking and sprawling!—so vivid and rich and strong”—but such praise as James had for the book was qualified (128).³ Like *Tono-Bungay* (1909), a chronicle of commercial and romantic adventure relating the meteoric rise of George Ponderevo’s (Wells’s narrator) uncle’s business ventures and his subsequent bankruptcy and humiliation, *Machiavelli* was written in the first person; it presented the perspective of the careerist politician Dick Remington who, high-mindedly pursuing a political career, is forced out of public life after an affair with Isabel Rivers, a young writer. James took Wells to task for his narrative style. He implied there were established formal criteria for writing novels that the younger author had disregarded, arguing that “the great interest of the art we practice involves a lot of considerations and preoccupations over which you more and more ride roughshod and triumphant—when you don’t, that is, with a strange

³ The remark suggests James did not like the second half of the book, dealing with Remington’s political career and his affair with Isabel Rivers.

and brilliant impunity of your own, leave them to one side altogether” (127).⁴ Whatever brilliance there was in the book, he thought Wells had done it “bad service . . . by riding so hard again that accurst autobiographic form which puts a premium on the loose, the impoverished, the cheap and the easy”—words that would come to define a characteristic theme in criticism about Wells throughout the twentieth century (128).⁵ For James, whatever was “alive and kicking” in the book was stifled by a form of storytelling with “no authority, no persuasive and convincing force,” whose “grasp of reality and truth isn’t strong and disinterested” (128). Instead of rejecting first-person narrative wholesale James approaches the problem obliquely, suggesting that it is only “the fantastic and the romantic (*Copperfield*, *Jane Eyre*, that charming thing of Stevenson’s with the bad title—‘Kidnapped?’)” that evade the charge “no authority, no . . . force” where first-person narrative is concerned (128). But this serves to place Wells subordinate to these models and James’s pronouns keep him there, gesturing inclusively to “the art *we* practice” before cutting Wells with “*you* don’t,” “*your* own,” “*you* now apparently incline most to do” (127; my italics).⁶

Wells would later complain about James’s “disingenuousness” in correspondence, for James’s letters typically mixed criticism with praise (*Experiment* 491). In Chapter 3, I discuss how aspects of earlier public remarks by James on the novel actually anticipate some of the critical principles Wells uses in his *Saturday* reviewing, including links Wells draws in his reviews between narrative perspective and the expression of an author’s personality or “temperament,” which James also valued highly, as well as the rejection of compositional rules for fiction, which develops in “The Contemporary Novel” into Wells’s strident claim that artists be afforded an “absolutely free hand” in choosing material and techniques (872).⁷ In any case, the consensus among writers on the correspondence of 1911 is that James was ambiguous rather than devious.⁸ Nevertheless, his ambiguity masked serious underlying doubts about Wells, and if Wells had read the prefaces James wrote for the “New York” collected edition of his novels and stories, he may well have been struck with the discrepancy

⁴ Wells turned forty-five in 1911, James sixty-eight.

⁵ See pp. 56–60 below for a discussion. James writes “again” but I am unable to trace an earlier complaint by James about Wells’s use of the first person: it is possible this took place during one of their many face-to-face conversations.

⁶ Batchelor notes a discrepancy between the “friendly” tone and the “damning” content of James’s letters to Wells (114).

⁷ See pp. Chapter 3, pp. 117–18. For Wells’s claim that novelists be given a free hand in matters of selection, see p. 22 below.

⁸ See Swan for an example: “the correspondence shows that this suspicion of insincerity and equivocation was not in Wells’s mind during the years of the friendship” (49).

between James's letters and his recently publicised thoughts on novel-writing.⁹

This is what James had to say about first-person narrative in his 1909 preface for *The Ambassadors*.¹⁰ Having declared that the "equilibrium of the artist's state dwells less, surely, in the further delightful complications he can smuggle in than in those he succeeds in keeping out," that the artist must sort, limit, and control or constrain his material, and that "composition alone is positive beauty," James rejected the first person on strict formal grounds (*Art of the Novel* 312, 319).¹¹ The personal report was a trap "pleading but the cause of the moment," an easy route to immediacy but one that was too subjective, a "menace," and "a form foredoomed to looseness" (320).¹² Here he even rejected the possibility of saving the personal report in romance, describing first-person story-telling as that genre's "darkest abyss" (320). It contradicts "certain precious discriminations" about form (the phrase anticipates the "considerations and preoccupations" he alleges in the *Machiavelli* letter), in particular those that "forbid the terrible *fluidity* of self-revelation" (321).¹³ For James, composition and narrative perspective went hand in hand as the essential preconditions for beauty in art.¹⁴ There is no ambiguity here, no suggestion that the author of these phrases

⁹ Edel and Ray suggest that James "abandoned hope for Wells" as a novelist after reading *Marriage* (1912) (27). Swan notes "[i]t is clear from the tone of the correspondence that James realised early that he would be incapable of any radical modification of Wells's attitude towards art" but "until about the year 1910 James's mind was open"; after the death of his brother (the psychologist and philosopher William James, who died August 1910) "and the almost complete failure of the great collected edition of his novels and stories . . . [h]e began to look upon the work of Wells and Bennett, and that of most of the new generation, with distrust—sometimes with antipathy" (48, 50, 51–52). (The twenty-four-volume New York edition of James's books was published between 1907 and 1909). I think the mistrust was well underway by March 1911, when James wrote the letter about *Machiavelli*, and that James's preface to *Ambassadors*, published two years earlier, provides evidence of clear and irreconcilable differences between James's and Wells's ideas on style before 1910. In a letter to Edith Wharton (31 Jan. 1909) he refers to the *English Review* serialisation of *Tono-Bungay*, disparaging the quality of both Wells's new work and the journal it was appearing in: "I hope you are reading 'Tonay-Bungay,' [sic] for the immense life & 'cheek' of it; but the barbarous want of art & of real doing isn't, to me, forgiveable [sic]. That periodical in fact is a poor show for English letters" (Powers 108).

¹⁰ The novel was first published in 1903 and republished in volume XXI of the New York edition (1909). In his introduction to a collection of James's prefaces, Blackmur notes that James thought *Ambassadors* his "finest and most intelligent . . . most perfectly rendered" novel, making the preface written for it especially worthy of attention (xxxii). He also suggests James's position on first-person narrative in the preface is idiosyncratic: "James bore a little heavily against this most familiar of all narrative methods" ("Introduction" xxix).

¹¹ "What James values is . . . a tight, carefully—even painstakingly—wrought structure for the novel" (Keesey 85).

¹² James would use similar terms about Wells's novel *Marriage* (1912), writing to Edmund Gosse (10 Oct. 1912): "I am not so much struck with its hardness as with its weakness and looseness, the utter going by the board of any real self-respect of composition and expression" (Lubbock 2:258–59).

¹³ Edel and Ray quote this last phrase and the one about "the darkest abyss of romance" in a footnote to the letter (128 note 1).

¹⁴ Blackmur's account, in his introduction to James's collected prefaces, of James's conception of the

could even enjoy a novel written in the first person. So James clearly rendered his view, well before producing the mixed tones of his response to Wells's *Machiavelli*.

Wells did not reply to James's letter for almost eight weeks. When he did, in a letter of 25 April, he wrote that he could not "answer it properly" and offered a "meagre apology for a response to the most illuminating of comments" (Edel and Ray 130). He appeared to accept the criticism "about the 'first-person.' The only artistic 'first-person' is the onlooker speculative 'first person,' and God helping me, this shall be the last of my gushing Hari-Karis" (130).¹⁵ But Wells was being disingenuous here himself. The genuflective gambit of his letter ("I wholly agree and kiss the rod") and his acquiescence in James's artistic authority cannot be taken at face value (130). For within three weeks he would perform a spirited defence of first-person narrative in a lecture read to the Times Book Club at its New Bond Street premises.¹⁶ In the two sections that follow, I provide a reading of this lecture, later published as "The Contemporary Novel," and compare Wells's main points to those

"fine central intelligence" as "compositional centre" and narrative perspective suggests what James had in mind when he bemoaned Wells's lack of "grasp of reality and truth" was essentially a problem of form. "James never put his reader in direct contact with his subjects," he writes; "he believed it was impossible to do so, because his subject really was not what happened but what someone felt about what happened, and this could be directly known only through an intermediate intelligence. . . . [T]his central intelligence . . . made a compositional centre for art such as life never saw" (xviii). Thus "reality" and "truth" for James are to be conceived as special terms of reference in relation to art, not metaphysical or logical categories.

¹⁵ As Batchelor notes, Wells returned to the first-person technique with *The Passionate Friends* (1913). See note 33 below for Wells's letter to James warning him of what to expect in terms of the new novel's form.

¹⁶ Opened on 11 September 1905 by the American entrepreneur and publisher of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* from 1897 until his death, Horace E. Hooper (1859–1922), the Times Book Club was a circulating library that offered to sell its books to members at discounted rates. Membership was at first restricted to subscribers to the *Times*, and opened to the general public in 1911. Wells's publisher at the time, Frederick Macmillan, had refused a distribution agreement with the Times Book Club; such an agreement entailed reduced royalties for authors. See Macmillan for an account of the ensuing "Book War" of 1906–08. Wells's initial attitude toward the Club was bellicose. Objecting to the omission of *Kipps* (1905) from a "list of recent books" published by the Club, Wells wrote to the editor of the *Times* (February 1906): "I see nothing for it but to write a letter upon your Book Club, and send a copy to every paper in the three kingdoms" (D. Smith, *Correspondence* 2:94). The language in a letter to the *Daily Mail* of October 1906 is markedly in contrast with the tone of the lecture Wells would deliver less than five years later: "the invasion of the book trade by these American advertisers of the 'Times' Book Club, seems to me a quite murderous raid upon literature. I can compare it to nothing so aptly as a rush of wild asses into a garden. . . . [T]he defeat of the 'Times' Book Club in this present dispute will be a victory for all that remains decent and leisurely and fine in contemporary literary life" (2:113, 115). W. L. Courtney, *Fortnightly* editor from 1894 to 1928, married the Club's librarian, Janet Hogarth, who resigned in 1909 when "the six big circulating libraries—Mudie, W. H. Smith, Boots, Day's, Cawthorn & Hutt, and the *Times* Book Club—briefly combined as the Circulating Libraries Association" and compiled a list "of books to be rejected and restricted," including Wells's *Ann Veronica* (Waller 981–82). See also Janet Courtney (née Hogarth), *Recollected in Tranquility* (London: Heinemann, 1926), pp. 194–97.

developed in an earlier public debate over the intellectual value of art. I argue that more than answering James's criticism and illuminating Wells's thoughts on writing novels, the lecture can be read as Wells's contribution to a broader debate about the possibility of an intellectual role for novelists and the fundamental principles of the relations of art and society.¹⁷

High and wide claims

On 18 May 1911, under the title "The Scope of the Novel" (it became "The Contemporary Novel" when it went to W. L. Courtney's *Fortnightly Review* for publication in November), Wells declared he was willing to "maintain against all comers" that Laurence Sterne, author of *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759–67), was "the greatest *artist*"—he "lay stress upon that word artist"—"that Great Britain has ever produced in all that is essentially the novel" ("Contemporary Novel" 864).¹⁸ If Sterne was an artist among artists then the "autobiographic form" (the story, of course, being one of Tristram's life told by Tristram) was hardly "accurst," "loose," "impoverished," or "cheap," to repeat the terms from James's letter—or, if it was, its value *as art* was hardly degraded as far as Wells

¹⁷ To this extent I agree with Anderson's finding that "both directly and indirectly it was in reply to James that Wells's ideas were most cogently formulated," with the proviso that the context of the debate over the intellectual value of art, which took place in the *English Review* the previous year, also be taken into account as an influence upon Wells's view (Bennett, *Wells and Conrad* 127). See p. 25 below.

¹⁸ The only evidence I have found for the precise date of the talk is Arnold Bennett's *New Age* column for 25 May 1911 which provides a brief review (*Books and Persons* 315). D. Smith has Shaw and Frank Swinnerton, as well as Bennett, present at the talk (*Desperately* 154). Wells is out by a good seven months at least in his autobiography, suggesting 1912 (*Experiment* 495). He may have had the American publication in mind: the talk was published in the London *Fortnightly Review* for November 1911 and the Boston *Atlantic Monthly* the following January. (Smith has it "in circulation in both the English and French press by June of 1911," but gives no reference: see D. Smith, *Correspondence* 2:296 note 1; I have not found any earlier version than that of the *Fortnightly*.) Wells uses the title of the published version when referring to the talk in his autobiography. While it is the published version that has been the focus of critical discussion since, I argue here that the timing of the original talk is crucial to understanding its context and significance. To avoid misunderstanding I refer throughout to "The Contemporary Novel," but I make no claim that the published version, from which I quote, is identical to the original lecture as delivered in May. Edel and Ray have Wells revising the paper for "serial and book publication" but do not specify revisions (131 note 1). The published version of the lecture was reprinted as Chapter 9 of Wells's 1914 essay anthology *An Englishman Looks at the World*; it is identical to the *Fortnightly* version except that references to the *Spectator* and *Westminster Gazette* are suppressed. This version appeared before the end of February 1914: there is a review in the *TLS* for 26 February, three weeks before the first instalment of James's "The Younger Generation" appeared in the same organ (*TLS* 19 March and 2 April 1914; reprinted in James's *Notes on Novelists* later in 1914 and in Edel and Ray 178–215). D. Smith has James taking the "bait" of "The Contemporary Novel" and penning "The Younger Generation"; he says that Wells and Swinnerton became friends as a result of Wells's appearance before the Times Book Club (*Desperately* 154, 169; see 153–57 for more on the Wells–Swinnerton relationship).

was concerned. Moreover if Sterne remained preeminent, by Wells's reckoning, even in the company of later novelists such as Scott, Brontë, Stevenson, Dickens, not to mention Wells's contemporaries, Conrad, Bennett, Gissing, Hueffer and, of course, James himself, this was partly by virtue of Sterne's choice of narrative point of view as much as his self-conscious modernity, his satire, or his parody of narrative convention, with Wells going so far as to claim that "first-personal interventions," if "done without affectations," introduce "a sort of subjective reality" capable of elevating a work into the ranks of genius: "Nearly all the novels that have, by the lapse of time, reached an assured position of greatness, are not only saturated in the personality of the author, but have, in addition, quite unaffected personal outbreaks" (865).¹⁹ Here Wells reiterates claims he made more than a decade earlier, in his *Saturday* reviewing, where he had censured books that suppressed their authors' personalities, preferring novels that offered a "genuine first-hand view of things" ("Fiction [VIII] 321).²⁰ Indeed it appears that Wells had a change of heart over the terms for defining the "artistic 'first-person'" sometime between considering his reply to James in his study and lecturing at New Bond Street. Having defended only the restrained "onlooker speculative" point of view in the letter to James, he now sought to justify even "personal outbreaks"—so long as they were genuine, sincere, unaffected (865). If Wells was drafting his talk in the weeks between receiving and replying to the letter from James, the sincerity of April's "meagre apology" is doubtful. With more than two months elapsing between James's letter and the May meeting of the Times Book Club, it seems more likely that, when Wells wrote of his desire to answer James "properly," he already had in mind the public forum as the perfect opportunity.²¹

The talk was about more than defending himself against James's criticism of his latest novel. Wells's audience was likely to have been familiar with *The New Machiavelli*, which had been causing a stir since the instalments began appearing in the *English Review* the previous May.²² They would not, however, have been privy to his personal correspondence, and there

¹⁹ See Thomas Keymer, *Sterne, the Moderns, and the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002) for a well-documented discussion of *Tristram Shandy* and criticism about Sterne.

²⁰ See Chapter 3, pp. 117–18 for a discussion.

²¹ I have found no evidence of an invitation by the Times Book Club to give the talk. Dickson says it was "during this month" between receiving and replying that Wells "was preparing the lecture" (205). Edel and Ray find that the lecture or its published version was Wells's reply to a number of "candid friends" and critics of his work, including James, and that James "could hardly have failed to read and to disagree" with it (29, 31).

²² See MacKenzie and MacKenzie, *Time Traveller* 267–71 for details on the publication and reception of *Machiavelli*. D. Smith notes that the audience for the talk comprised, other than literary friends such as Bennett, Swinnerton, and Shaw, "women who were interested in Wells but who distinguished

is no direct mention of James or any of Wells's novels in the lecture.²³ Free of an overtly defensive tone, the talk lays out in positive terms Wells's thoughts about the importance of the novel in (and for) contemporary society. He opens with the claim that the novel is "a very important and necessary thing indeed in that complicated system of uneasy adjustments and re-adjustments which is modern civilisation," warning that he is about to "make very high and wide claims for it" (860). This was more than lecturing convention on Wells's part. He was preparing his audience for claims they might find unusual, in which the novel was to feature as something more significant than an accoutrement of civilised culture or mere pastime (Wells rejected the "Weary Giant theory of the novel . . . the idea that the novel is merely a harmless opiate for the vacant hours of prosperous men") (861).²⁴ I make the case below that Wells wanted to say the novel is "important and necessary" simply *because* "modern civilisation" *is* such a "complicated system of uneasy adjustments and readjustments," but not as a mere escape from this "system."²⁵ He was making a claim for the novel as a kind of applied literary sociology, a medium for the study and comprehension of society as a whole, especially of its moral and intellectual challenges.²⁶

themselves by their crudity in dress and manner" (*Desperately* 154). The Club had not promoted earlier novels by Wells because his publisher refused to negotiate a distribution contract. See note 16 above for more details and for Wells's thoughts on the Times Book Club before 1911.

²³ He does allude to the public controversy over the earlier *Ann Veronica* and mentions Conrad in passing in the opening paragraph and again as an example (citing *Lord Jim*) of first-person intervention "done without affectation" (860, 865, 873). It is worth noting that, according to Edel and Laurence, the Times Book Club issued "more titles of James than of any other single author in its catalogue—thirty-four of his works plus five volumes containing his prefaces or introductions were advertised in the Club's first catalogue of 1905" (386); this was the catalogue that had omitted *Kipps*: see note 16 above for Wells's acerbic response. Not naming James as occupant of an opposing position distinguishes favourably, I think, Wells's strategy in the lecture from James's later and derisory public critique of Wells in his article on "The Younger Generation." James's essay (see note 18 above for publication details) was published a few weeks after the reappearance of Wells's "The Contemporary Novel" as a chapter in *An Englishman Looks At the World* (1914), and preceded the publication of *Boon* in which Wells lampooned James.

²⁴ Batchelor notes that the suggestion that there was such a thing as a "Weary Giant theory" highlights a problem in Wells's literary history which "is manifestly wrong. . . . [I]t was clearly recognised from the 1840s onwards that the novel was a vehicle of moral judgement and social education" (115). It is worth pointing out that Wells was not the only literary figure making such a claim at this time. In his *New Laokoon* of 1910, the Harvard humanist Irving Babbitt had argued a similar point, claiming that a Romantic tendency in criticism pandered to "the fagged philologist and the weary man of business," and drew similar conclusions to Wells's (in deliberately gendered terminology), arguing that such tendencies encouraged a feminisation of literature against which Babbitt proposed more "analytical keenness and intellectual virility . . . [t]he revival of the firm and masculine distinction" in criticism (244).

²⁵ Keesey notes Wells's diagnosis of James's own "grievous omissions" of reality in a remark in *Experiment* that "[w]hen you want to read and find reality too real . . . you may find Henry James good company" (Keesey 81; Wells, *Experiment* 537).

²⁶ Kumar uses the phrase "literary sociology" to define Wells's conception of the role of the novel in *A*

Having outlined the distinctive traits of the novel in terms of its attitude toward character—unlike the short story the novel is “a discursive thing; . . . not a single interest, but a woven tapestry of interests”; its “distinctive value . . . is in characterisation, and the charm of a well-conceived character lies, not in knowing its destiny, but in watching its proceedings”—Wells makes two related claims for the novel’s social importance (863). It is, on the one hand, a moral and, on the other, an intellectual statement about society.²⁷ First, a novel will always have “moral consequences” even where the novelist does not pursue a didactic end or even favour one character over another (866). The novel “leaves impressions . . . of acts judged and made attractive or unattractive”; even when “very slight . . . very shallow in the long run,” these moral “impressions” are the novel’s “almost inevitable accompaniments”; they are beyond the power of the novelist to avoid but where a novelist possesses “greater . . . skill” and demonstrates “more convincing . . . treatment, the more vivid his power of suggestion” (866). In short, in as much as the novelist “cannot avoid, as people say, putting ideas into his readers’ heads,” these ideas are fundamentally moral ones (866). This first aspect of the novel’s importance to “modern civilisation” lies, therefore, in its function as a “study and judgment of conduct” (867). Character is “well-conceived” where the examination of relationships leads to ideas and evaluations of the possibilities for and constraints placed upon conduct.

Wells’s second major claim is an extension of the first. If the novelist is a dealer in “ideas,” he argues, then one must admit the intellectual significance of his art. But intellect is not valued here for its own sake. As the following passage shows, in its reference to “an intellectual spring” characterised by the “criticism” directed at “faith,” “standard,” and “rule,” Wells views the novel as a kind of social criticism, the latest manifestation of the eternal “conflict of authority against criticism,” an actor in the socio-moral drama of the times:

[W]hile we live in a period of tightening and extending social organization, we live also in a period of adventurous and insurgent thought, in an intellectual spring unprecedented in the world’s history. There is an enormous criticism going on of the faiths upon which men’s lives and associations are based, and of every standard and rule of conduct. And it is inevitable that the novel, just in the measure of its sincerity and ability, should reflect and co-operate in the

Modern Utopia (1905) and a talk on “The So-Called Science of Sociology” (1906). I discuss the relation between contemporary sociological debates and Wells’s conception of the novel in the next chapter: see pp. 85–95.

²⁷ See Lodge, “Tono-Bungay” 216–17 for examples of the Victorian “‘Condition of England Novel’ . . . which sought to articulate and interpret . . . the changing nature of English society,” and his argument about Wells’s allegiance with this tradition (216).

atmosphere and uncertainties and changing variety of this seething and creative time. (868)

Here Wells suggests that, unlike novelists' moral commitments which may or may not be consciously apprehended, the true intellectual role for the novel must be not only deliberate, but critical and sincere. *Engaged*, too, not a reflection on the conflict or a representation of it, but "a necessary part of the conflict," committed to "the reassertion of the importance of the individual instance as against the generalisation" by examining character in its social context (869). This is what Wells means when he refers to watching a character's "proceedings," a matter of observing an individual within a social milieu, embedded within a network of ideas, institutions, and relationships. This conception of character as an "instance," as a convincing human reality rather than a "generalisation," is the foundation for the intellectual role Wells envisages the novel fulfilling, a "study" of the structures of society in a state of flux.²⁸ "We perceive more and more clearly," Wells writes, in a passage defining the purpose of the novel as essentially sociological,

that the study of social organization is an empty and unprofitable study until we approach it as a study of the association and inter-reaction of individualised human beings inspired by diversified motives, ruled by traditions, and swayed by the suggestions of a complex intellectual atmosphere. . . . And this is where the value and opportunity of the modern novel comes in. So far as I can see, it is the only medium through which we can discuss the great majority of the problems which are being raised in such bristling multitude by our contemporary social development. (869)

By claiming that the novel was the only medium for such a discussion, Wells was reiterating and developing a point he had first made five years earlier in a lecture read to the London Sociological Society, and his references to "social organization" and "social development" are markers of his interest and involvement in contemporary sociological debates—I pick these matters up again in Chapter 2.²⁹ The novel's value as *littérature engagée* is measured by its exploitation of the opportunities for sociological discussion presented by its material.³⁰ But what role, specifically, does Wells see the novel playing in these matters? It is to be a discussion of social problems; he had already alluded to this when he claimed that the novel

²⁸ In Chapter 2, summarising Wells's 1902 Royal Institution lecture on "The Discovery of the Future," I show that Wells endorses the rejection of dogmatic moral codes in favour of a more pragmatic attitude towards rules of conduct, although there he effectively rejects literature as the appropriate medium for such progressive socio-moral criticism, and prefers inductive reasoning and broad generalisations on the model of scientific method. See Chapter 2 for this discussion, pp. 74–85, and my argument about how Wells's increasing association with the London intellectual elite provoked him to restore to the novel the task of social criticism that he first proposed during his tenure at the *Saturday Review*.

²⁹ See Chapter 2, pp. 85–95 below.

³⁰ "Wells and Shaw, as socialists, believed in '*la littérature engagée*,' a useable, functional art appropriate to the new world they wished to fashion out of the old" (Edel and Ray 11).

would be “discursive . . . a woven tapestry of interests” in which the “proceedings” of its characters were of chief concern (863). But what is the *point* of such a discussion?

The answer here lies in the word “medium” in the passage quoted above. More than a destructive criticism of “standard and rule,” of life, ideas, forms of association and conduct, the novel is to be a means for experimenting with new forms of life and manners. It is a “criticism of laws and institutions and social dogmas and ideas” but it is also a “vehicle of understanding” and in this it mimics or is part of general social development (872). Both civilisation and the novel aim at a widening of sympathies, an increase in “the range of understanding,” Wells argues; among literary forms the novel is the sole medium capable of this, he says (871). Drama is “too objective a medium”; biography, autobiography, history “can hardly ever get beyond the statement that the superficial fact was so” (871, 872). But the novel, concerned with fiction not fact, has “a power of veracity quite beyond that of actual records. Every novel carries its own justification and its own condemnation in its success or failure to convince you that *the thing was so*” (872). Wells defends a kind of social realism in the novel, one which, in its ability to “reflect and co-operate in” social structures and change, not only represents but *presents* possibilities, configurations, relationships.³¹ The passage reiterates preferences Wells had stated in his *Saturday* reviewing for novels that depicted characters “living under the full stress of this great social force or that,” that presented the “relativity” of characters and social contexts (“Novel of Types” 23; “Slum Novel” 573). It is a defence on the grounds of the “subjective reality” Wells attributes to first-person narratives, stressing the intimate relationship between the handling of perspective and the unique qualities and “power” or effect of the novel as a literary form (“Contemporary Novel” 865, 872). Wells’s conception of social realism in the novel combines his desire for a form of social criticism with general claims about what makes a novel a novel and not some other form of writing.³²

³¹ The distinction between “represent” and “present” here is open to confusion and I point out that I am aware that Wells, in his introduction to the American edition of Frank Swinerton’s *Nocturne* (1917), says that he had “never once ‘presented’ life” (“Introduction” x). (This and the preceding sentence read: “In the—I forget exactly how many—books I have written, it is always about life being altered I write, or about people developing schemes for altering life. And I have never once ‘presented’ life.”) I use “present” as a counterpart for “alter” or “develop” as Wells uses those terms in this passage, a response, not a passive reflection.

³² See Chapter 3, pp. 126–29 for a detailed discussion of Wells’s critical preferences for social realism in the novel, his technical discussion of narrative perspective, and the consequences for his own conception of the novel and its constructive social effects. Wells’s claim in “The Contemporary Novel” that the novel is “the only medium” for discussion of the problems raised “by our contemporary social development” is an advance on an earlier formulation in his reviewing for the *Saturday* and a pair of articles, on “Human Evolution” and “Morals and Civilisation” in the *Fortnightly Review* for October

The well-known conclusion to “The Contemporary Novel” is a plea for unrestrained tolerance for subject matter, “an absolutely free hand for the novelist in his choice of topic and incident and in his method of treatment” (872), if the novel is to be true to its essential function (by Wells’s reckoning) of revealing and interrogating the relations of individuals to ideas, institutions, to society and life as a whole:

We are going to write, subject only to our own limitations, about the whole of human life. We are going to deal with political questions and religious questions and social questions. We cannot present people unless we have this free hand, this unrestricted field. . . . Before we have done, we will have all of life within the scope of the novel. (873)

An unrestricted subject matter, a perspective encompassing “the whole of human life”: nothing could be further from James’s own conception of method, based on limitation, constraint, “equilibrium” (*Art of the Novel* 312). Short of direct contradiction, there could be no clearer rejoinder to James’s contention that Wells’s writing overlooked the “considerations and preoccupations” of the novelist, had no “authority,” no “grasp of reality and truth,” for in his lecture Wells had spelt out precisely his own preoccupations, his sense of artistic authority, the kind of authenticity he valued, the singular “power of veracity” of the longer fictional form lying in its potential to present compelling alternatives in ideas and relationships encompassing the gamut of social phenomena.

Wells shifted the grounds of the debate rather than meet James directly, writing not about a novel’s “composition” but of its “scope,” about *what* a novelist should write about, not *how* a novel should be written. Advocating a “free hand” in both “topic” and “method,” he limits technical considerations to one aspect of the greater question of a novel’s scope, instead of making it the principal and defining question. He favours first-person perspective as that most likely to produce the “sort of subjective reality” that could sustain readers’ sympathy and encourage an increase in their “range of understanding,” but only because first-person perspective is the easiest way to get at the subjective quality of social experience, this being the essential justification for the novel (“Contemporary Novel” 865, 871). Wells’s choice of figure (the “scope” of the novel) suggests he was not interested in bothering with the formal technicalities, those “considerations,” “preoccupations,” and “precious discriminations” that were of such importance to James, though he does make general claims about perspective suitable for the non-specialist audience the lecture addresses (Edel and Ray

1896 and February 1897. Presenting a theory of social evolution, Wells advances a sceptical position on the possibility of constructive social effects, and obscures generic differences between kinds of writing; see Chapter 3, pp. 137–48 below for discussion.

127; James, *Art of the Novel* 321). Wells is more interested here in outlining a defence of the novel in terms of the social questions that define, in his view, the contemporary situation—questions the novel must reach out to inclusively, inquiringly, critically—than defending the novel along exclusively aesthetic lines: the scope metaphor and the qualifying terms “free” and “unrestricted” suggest a felt need to escape from imposed limitations, from all but “our own limitations.”³³ At the same time, this is no anything-goes aesthetic. It is a claim for the novel’s unique sociological significance in terms of its potential to contribute to a fund of ideas and its efforts at sympathetic imagination and understanding, and for the need to determine precisely what one’s “own limitations” might be. But if Wells had not derived his conception of the novel and its “scope” from James, or even by directly contradicting James, were there, in the immediate context of English letters, other precedents for his position?³⁴

The constructive moment

Discussion about the grounds for Wells’s debate with James has focused on their correspondence, “The Contemporary Novel,” James’s two-part article on “The Younger Generation” (1914), which publicly derogated Wells’s novels, Wells’s attack on James in his novel *Boon* (1915), which brought their relationship to a close, and his reflections on the period in the autobiographical “Digression About Novels.”³⁵ Here I briefly explore two other

³³ Wells was not oblivious to what James was trying to get across in his letters. In a reply of 19 October 1912 he would write of his “next book,” *The Passionate Friends* (1913), that it “is ‘scandalously’ bad in form, mixed pickles and I know it. . . . I will seek earnestly to make my pen lead a decent life, pull myself together, think of Form” (Edel and Ray 169). As the playful reference to “scandal” suggests, this was about as likely as Wells backing down in the face of public controversy over the female protagonists in his books.

³⁴ Although I discuss immediate theoretical precedents, it is worth noting that Wells cited “Swift, Sterne, Jane Austen, Thackeray and the Dickens of *Bleak House*” as the “idols” of his “youthful imitation” (“Introduction” ix). See Chapter 3 for a discussion of Wells’s response to other contemporary novelists, especially Dickens, Turgenev, Hardy, and Lie, as well as the influence of Poe.

³⁵ Edel and Ray give the classic account (favouring James), but see also Anderson, “Self and Society”; Batchelor 113–22; Keesey; MacKenzie and Mackenzie, *Time Traveller* 276–82 and 290–94; D. Smith, *Desperately* 151–76; and Swan. Parrinder and Philmus also discuss “The Novel of Ideas” (1940) and describe it as Wells’s most important contribution to the debate, but I find no advance there on the previous formulations (216). Wells’s remark in “The Novel of Ideas,” which he makes after reviewing the debates of the 1900s and 1910s, that his approach to art is to focus on “the problems of human life and behaviour as we find them incarnate in persons” is no advance on the position outlined in “The Contemporary Novel” (qtd. in Parrinder and Philmus 218). See note 18 above for details on James’s *TLS* articles; Parrinder and Philmus 181–83 has a summary of the “special opprobrium” James reserved for Wells there. “The Contemporary Novel” may possess generative as well as doctrinal significance, especially if one reads the later developments in the Wells–James debate not solely as evidence of Wells’s reactionary argumentativeness but of James’s. Wells reissued “The Contemporary Novel,” his best argument about an alternative to James’s position on the novel, as a chapter of *An Englishman Looks at the World* at the end of February 1914. The book was reviewed, among other places,

documents as part of an attempt to clarify a problem in the existing literature: whether “The Contemporary Novel” of 1911 or the “Digression About Novels” of 1934 is the better account of Wells’s thinking on the relationship between art and society *circa* 1911.³⁶ In later sections of this chapter, I argue that the “Digression” is deceptive and even logically defective compared to the argument of the 1911 lecture.³⁷ Distinguishing between these accounts is desirable if one is to grasp the nature of Wells’s attempt to balance aesthetic and social objectives in the novel. I make a start here by exploring how the terms of engagement for “The Contemporary Novel,” its intellectual and moral scope, its function as social critique and its justification as social experiment, had been worked out in the pages of the very organ that Wells had supported from its inception and which had serialised two of his novels by the end of 1910—the *English Review*.

The first issue of the *Review*, with Ford Madox Hueffer as editor, appeared in December 1908.³⁸ It featured the first instalment of the serialised version of Wells’s latest novel, *Tono-*

in the *Times Literary Supplement* for 26 February, three weeks before the first instalment, on 19 March in the same forum, of James’s “The Younger Generation” articles, in which James attacked Wells for flinging his mental stuff “from a high window forever open” (Edel and Ray 190). Whether or not James had “The Contemporary Novel” in mind when he wrote his article is uncertain. (Although D. Smith has James taking the “bait” of “The Contemporary Novel” and penning “The Younger Generation”: *Desperately* 169). What is clear is that Wells was moved to take up a work that he had started in 1905 and later abandoned, and to stage his own attack in *Boon* (D. Smith, *Desperately* 170). This provoked James’s now classic statement that art “*makes* life, makes interest, makes importance” (Edel and Ray 267; see p. 36). But Wells at this time was unmoved, made no constructive statements of comparable concision, and embarked upon a repudiative campaign recurring for the rest of his career. I suggest that however fascinating, however revealing these later developments may be about Wells’s shortcomings and evasiveness in addressing the issues pressed in argument, the subsequent exchange of views says less about the substance of Wells’s thought than James’s.

³⁶ Existing views on which account is preferable are mixed. Batchelor finds the “Digression” “a better defence of [Wells’s] practice than that contained in ‘The Contemporary Novel,’” as does Anderson, who finds it “the fullest account of his own dissenting philosophy of the novel” (Batchelor 119; Anderson, “Self and Society” 201); Bergonzi uses the most striking figure Wells introduces to the later account, the “splintering frame,” as an organizing motif in his book on *The Situation of the Novel* (210). D. Smith adopts the opposing view, calling the 1911 lecture Wells’s “strongest attack on Jamesian ideas on writing” (*Correspondence* 2:296 note 1); Swan, though he does not mention the 1911 talk, writes that everything after the 1915 break with James was “no more than a coda,” and the “Digression” simply further evidence of Wells’s failure to understand his interlocutor, and his urge to continue attacking him (63, 65). Parrinder and Philmus write that the 1911 lecture “represents Wells’s fullest attempt to bring together and systematize many of the ideas that he had put forward as a reviewer of fiction in the 1890s,” though they must mean his fullest attempt at the time, since they suggest later that Wells’s preface to *Babes in the Darkling Wood* (1940), headed “The Novel of Ideas,” is “perhaps his most important” word on the subject (179, 216). For reasons I now go on to explore, I favour “The Contemporary Novel” as a formulation of Wells’s attempt to balance aesthetic and social objectives.

³⁷ See from p. 32 below.

³⁸ Hueffer (Ford Madox Ford from 1919), was editor for a year before surrendering the helm to Austin Harrison (1873–1928), although Mizener has him continuing as editor until February 1910 (170).

Bungay, which ran for four issues until March 1909; *The New Machiavelli* was serialised over seven months from May to November the following year and was not the last of Wells's books to be printed in the *Review*. He was involved in getting the *Review* off the ground from January 1908, promising to share the editorship with Hueffer and contribute half of the initial costs. In the event Wells's involvement was the catalyst for the disintegration of his relationship with Hueffer, their correspondence petering out in bickering over unpaid royalties and financial misadventure.³⁹

The articles in question appeared over two issues from late 1909, and centred on whether art could take on a "constructive" function, pursuing a critique of institutions and ideas with the creation of new ideological and sociological possibilities by opening the door to subject matter and modes of thought hitherto deemed the province of more "intellectual" disciplines. The affirmative case for constructive art was presented by the social theorist J. A. Hobson (1858–1940) in a piece on "The Task of Realism," printed in the *Review* for October 1909, the negative by Hueffer, in his column "The Critical Attitude" the following month.⁴⁰

³⁹ Now acknowledged as a significant vehicle for literary modernism, the *Review* published new poetry, fiction, and essays as well as reviews and criticism; between 1908 and 1910 its pages featured work by, among many others, Belloc, Bennett, Chesterton, Conrad, Forster, Galsworthy, Hardy, Hueffer, James, Lawrence, Pound, Tolstoy, and Yeats. For an account of Hueffer's objectives for the journal see Mark Morrison, "The Myth of the Whole: Ford's *English Review*, the 'Mercure de France,' and Early British Modernism," *ELH* 63 (1996): 513–33. Despite its function as a modernist vehicle, Mottram claims it was Wells's novels that made the *Review* under Hueffer "almost a spear-point in a new movement" (100). Ludwig has letters from Hueffer to Wells, late 1909 to early 1910, documenting the arrangements over the *Review* (31–38, 42); a letter from Hueffer (2 April 1910) details the exhaustion of the initial investment of November 1908 by August 1909: "this sum being spent and feeling disinclined to continue labours that were extremely arduous and unrequited Marwood [Arthur Pierson Marwood, Hueffer's main partner on the venture] and I decided to discontinue the Review" (42). They were rescued by a "speculator" but Hueffer was no longer a financial partner but editor on a salary "which, by the bye, after a time was not paid" (42). D. Smith has Wells's letters to Hueffer from the end of 1908 and start of 1909, discussing the canvassing of subscribers, arranging the serialisation of *Tono-Bungay*, which Wells was concerned might seem to Macmillan "an anticipatory publication of the book," and describing the alienation of Hueffer from Wells, who writes (2 April 1909) of "such quaint, but I should think irksome, necessities as you impose upon yourself at present, of pretending not to be yourself when speaking through the telephone to me, and of corresponding in strange and oblique manners" (*Correspondence* 2:225–26, 233, 234, 239). Mizener dates the explosion into "quarrel" between the two shortly after October 1908, as a result of Wells's concerns that "the sales of *Tono-Bungay* would be damaged by the remaindering of copies of the *Review*" (161). See Mizener 154–170 for a narrative of the major players and events during Hueffer's editorship. The novelist and travel-writer Douglas Goldring, who was sub-editor of the *Review* at its inauguration, gives an entertaining account of the circumstances of its establishment (14–30). The *Review* was, at least at first, a financial failure: the net loss of the first issue alone, Goldring writes, "must have staggered even a Northcliffe" (30). Mizener has a letter to Wells suggesting £1200 in losses over the first four numbers (160).

⁴⁰ See Parrinder, *Critical Heritage* 16–17 for his discussion of Hueffer's article and his treatment of Wells "as an object-lesson of the dangers surrounding an artist who set out to occupy the position of a 'man

In “The Task of Realism,” Hobson claimed for contemporary rationalists what Wells would claim for novelists in “The Contemporary Novel,” the criticism of institutions and ideas. Significantly, Hobson defined this critical moment as essentially negative, noting that “the term rationalism [had] acquired a destructive rather than a constructive meaning” (543). Such “old fixed faiths” and foundations of society as religion, property, the family, and the means of production, had been attacked by an onslaught of rationalist criticism, Hobson wrote (549). “The engines of criticism were battering each of them,” with accuracy of aim if not demonstrable results, a balance he claimed was in transition. “The modern intellectual forces could be kept under but could not be kept out,” he writes, before alerting the *Review*’s subscribers to “signs of a great intellectual and spiritual revival” expressing itself in “new forms of realism in poetry, the drama, prose fiction and art” (549–50). Here Hobson makes wider claims for intellectual objectives in art than Wells, who would place the novel above all other forms of writing and all other forms of intellectual study, in its ability to “convince,” to present plausible analyses of individuals’ relations with institutions and ideas. But Hobson’s conclusions are similar, if one overlooks his greater tolerance for genre: literature exploits a broad and inclusive subject matter, it is the foremost medium for pressing critical issues home (Hobson complained about the “formal resistance of the educational and intellectual world . . . in refusing to discuss or even to recognise the graver questions of the age”) and, preoccupied with these questions or “problems,” is on the cusp of enjoying a prestige previously unknown to art as—using this key word again—the “constructive” centrepiece of a new cultural movement (549, 550). He continues:

The very problems which, springing directly from scientific history, biology and economics, had hitherto been most successfully evaded, have forced their way into a drama and a fiction which are actually becoming popular. Heredity, alike in its physical and moral bearings, the origins of poverty and luxury, the struggles of sex, of capital and labour, the corruptions of politics and religion, not merely furnish the material of art and the drama, but they are treated in modes of demonstration which, challenging the fundamental assumptions of the older art, give it a novel intellectual and emotional authority. (550)

The outlook on the relationship between art and society described in this passage, in its call for the “demonstration” of the conditions of modern life, anticipates Wells’s call for a novel that would reveal character within “proceedings” and “deal with political questions and religious questions and social questions . . . business and finance and politics and precedence and pretentiousness and decorum and indecorum,” in short, with “the whole of human life”

of intellect” (16).

(“Contemporary Novel” 863, 873). Like Wells, who defines the contemporary intellectual outlook in terms of an “intellectual spring,” Hobson has the concerns of the literary artist “springing directly” from allied intellectual disciplines. Hobson’s “new art” has emotional as well as intellectual consequences, just as Wells’s contemporary novel would have moral consequences and work at enlarging human sympathy and understanding. This point is as essential to Hobson’s argument in “The Task of Realism” as it would be to Wells in “The Contemporary Novel”: for Hobson, realism in art, like rationalism in thought, had passed through a destructive, critical phase, “exposing the falsehood of the ancient party watchwords and cleavages,” and now is “craving intelligible and mentally satisfactory principles” of its own (550). Once recovered, these principles will provide the intellectual foundation for a reconstruction of society; they will work “to reverse the dissociative current, which everywhere made for separation, and to lay the main intellectual and spiritual stress on harmony and unity,” remarks echoed in Wells’s emphasis on understanding human life as a whole (Hobson 551; Wells, “Contemporary Novel” 873). Whether Wells read Hobson’s article or not, his lecture to the Times Book Club would elaborate upon Hobson’s major theme, an expansive approach to not just the representation of life but an intellectual engagement with it in the interests of social criticism and reconstruction.

Hueffer made it clear in the following month’s issue that he disagreed with Hobson’s fundamental premise, denying that art could be intellectual while residing at the cutting edge of creative endeavour and social progress. Appearing a diplomatic seven months after the final instalment of *Tono-Bungay*, the piece, one in a series of articles in the *Review* with the title “The Critical Attitude,” includes a direct attack on the kind of art Wells represented, rejecting the possibility of “constructive,” socially-engaged art with pretensions of intellectual prestige.⁴¹ Hueffer accepted as fact that some artists would gravitate toward the social and political issues of their day, and distinguished between authors “wholly concerned with their Art” and nothing *but* their art, who remained aloof from “external considerations,” naming James, Conrad, and George Moore, against Wells and Kipling, who are “not artists in the strict sense that they have any canons of Art by which they work” (659).⁴² There appear to be

⁴¹ Hueffer mentions Wells by name in his article. He does not refer directly to Hobson’s essay (which, conversely, had not named Wells in his depiction of “a drama and a fiction which are actually becoming popular”), but the terminology employed (“constructive,” “intellectual”) and the diametrically opposed objective (to dismiss the practicality of a constructive art), even if coincidental, define terms of a debate.

⁴² The remark anticipates some by T. S. Eliot in the introduction to *The Sacred Wood* (1920), that

two criteria for the distinction Hueffer makes between camps here, single-minded artistic sensibility and the upholding of “canons.” Really these are aspects of a solitary standard. Wells and Kipling have no “canons of Art” *because* they justify their methods by reference to those “external considerations” toward which the true artist is indifferent. They are (or want to be) intellectuals, not artists; what they create is theory, not art. Hueffer calls into question Hobson’s contention that art was in the act of transition into a phase of constructive social engagement. He suggests that if this transition takes place one will no longer be talking about *art as such*, something justified by its adherence to aesthetic rules, something transcending (or simply ignoring) the social and intellectual constraints of the moment, but a kind of theoretic dialectic, an intellectual, not artistic, response to the world, one that is impermanent, provisional, and subject to insufferable refutation and attack:

[T]he moment you become constructive your theory is an integral part of yourself and you will defend it according to the intensity of its hold upon you until you are worsted in correspondence in the public press or until you have earned the faggot and the halo of martyrdom. It is perhaps foolish—it is certainly perilous for the imaginative writer to attempt to occupy the position of the man of intellect. The imaginative writer, in fact, has practically never any intellectual power whatever except in one or other department of life. His business is to register a truth as he sees it, and no more than Pilate can he, as a rule, see the truth as it is. Moreover, in all intellectual subjects the accepted truth of to-day is the proven lie of to-morrow, and it is only the specialist who can discern in any given realm of human knowledge what is the fashion of to-day and what is permanent. (667)

Here Hueffer shows that he accepts the link between being “constructive,” that is, committing oneself to doctrine in the attempt to win influence in the borderland between ideas and social realities, and attempting to reap whatever benefits of intellectual prestige are to be had. But he does not recommend being constructive as a professional option for writers. He says the corollary of prestige is adversity, vulnerability to shifts in the intellectual climate, exposure to public dissent from one’s doctrinal enemies. (One wonders why Hueffer thought *artists* never had to worry about such things.) The artist would make a poor intellectual anyway, or so Hueffer suggests, drawing a tacit distinction between “the specialist” and “the imaginative writer” with aspirations above his station, who in reality is too intellectually limited (perhaps because of that single-mindedness Hueffer advocates) to make authoritative and lasting judgments about anything other than his own narrow

writers “like Mr. Wells and Mr. Chesterton” had “done well for themselves in laying literature aside,” spending all their time in “clean[ing] up the whole country” and “setting the house in order” rather than devoting themselves to (what Eliot calls “constructive work”) the true task of criticism in comparing types of works and types of authors (xi, xiii). It is an interesting remark, given Hueffer’s friendship with the Liberal politician C. F. G. Masterman and his involvement “behind the scenes in Liberal Party politics” (Goldring 15).

“department of life.”

Hueffer’s opposition of imagination to intellect is an odd one—for a *novelist* to make. His line is that all power and authority are the province of the intellectual, and the main contention about why artists should hesitate before the intellectual life is that it is risky. It is possible he had Wells’s novel *Ann Veronica* in mind here—or, more precisely, the controversy that had erupted over it in the press. The story of woman in her early twenties who seeks an existence independent of the strictures of conventional family life, studies biology at university, joins the Suffrage movement and is arrested, before marrying a university laboratory demonstrator and starting a family, *Ann Veronica* appeared in October, the month prior to Hueffer’s article; a hostile review, effectively an attack on Wells’s moral integrity, was printed in John St Loe Strachey’s *Spectator* for 20 November 1909, although adverse reviews appeared in the London press during October.⁴³ Wells would allude to the book in his lecture to the Times Book Club, writing that it would take more than such things as “the scurrility of the *Spectator*” to “stop the incoming tide of aggressive novel-writing,” by which he meant the kind of intellectually critical and socially constructive novel-writing he endorsed, with no constraints upon method or material (“Contemporary Novel” 873). In any case, Hueffer is opposed to the enlargement of focus that Hobson saw in “the material of art,” its grappling with the “problems” of history, heredity, sex, capital, labour, politics, and religion which invested it with not just artistic merit but intellectual authority, anticipating Wells on the “political questions and religious questions and social questions” and the “free hand” required in the interests of “present[ing] people” (Hobson, “Task of Realism” 550; Wells, “Contemporary Novel” 873). If being constructive meant not just adopting a critical, progressive doctrinal position but placing social objectives over aesthetic ones, Hueffer would have none of it: the novelist must think only of his art.

These articles by Hobson and Hueffer provide a precedent for the distinction Wells makes between the “scope” of the novel and Jamesian method, in the distinction between intellectual “problems” (Hobson) or “theory” (Hueffer) on one hand and strictly aesthetic considerations on the other: like Wells, Hobson saw the gap between intellectual and artist

⁴³ See Parrinder, *The Critical Heritage* 157–74 for a selection of contemporary reviews. The *Spectator* reviewer thought the book “capable of poisoning the minds of those who read it,” teaching, “in effect, that there is no such thing as a woman’s honour”; far from being a manifesto for revolution in sexual relations, the book, the reviewer thought, was ultimately “a piece of dangerous and demoralising sophistry” (*Critical Heritage* 170, 172).

closing, with the artist poised to take advantage of his popular appeal. Hueffer saw preoccupation with “external considerations” as a peril and something to be avoided, and especially regrettable in popular authors.⁴⁴ Considered in light of Hobson’s and Hueffer’s articles in the *English Review*, “The Contemporary Novel” can be read as Wells’s contribution to the broader public debate, beyond the confines of private correspondence. It is a belated response, with the *Review* articles appearing over a year before Wells delivered his talk to the Times Book Club. But, as Hueffer’s article makes clear, Wells was a factor in his contribution to the debate, evidence of the damage done to art by being constructive, which for Hueffer meant courting intellectual prestige. Wells was at least good at this, Hueffer writes: “The most intellectually influential figure in England at the present day is that of Mr. H. G. Wells” (“Critical Attitude” 666).⁴⁵

Perhaps there was something of the competitive spirit behind Hueffer’s attack. In May 1909, which happened to be the month that the *Ambassadors* volume of James’s New York edition came out, the Liberal politician, political theorist, and literary editor of the *Daily News* C. F. G. Masterman (1873–1927), a mutual friend of Hueffer and Wells, published his book on *The Condition of England*.⁴⁶ Masterman’s book was a study and critique of Edwardian society. The first chapter of the book is headed “The Spirit of the People,” recalling the title of the final instalment of Hueffer’s English trilogy, a series of impressionistic works exploring English life and customs that comprised *The Soul of London* (1905), *The Heart of the Country* (1906) and *The Spirit of the People* (1907). Masterman quotes twice from *Spirit*, calling it “a clever and suggestive analysis of Middle-Class England” (C. Masterman 14). But the attention lavished upon Wells in Masterman’s book is overwhelming by comparison. Masterman opens with a line from *Tono-Bungay*, the proofs of which he had read before publication (L. Masterman 119), and he quotes freely and in detail from a number of Wells’s novels published since the turn of the century: *Love and Mr. Lewisham*, *Kipps*, *A Modern Utopia*, *The War in the Air*, and *Tono-Bungay*. For Hueffer there could be no more obvious evidence

⁴⁴ In a chapter on Wells in *Mightier than the Sword* (1938), Hueffer would accuse him of abandoning imaginative writing for politics “or something of the sort,” and regret the loss of an artist to “Public Affairs”: “every real artist in words who deserts the occupation of pure imaginative writing to immerse himself in the Public Affairs that have ruined our world, takes away a little of our chance of coming alive through these lugubrious times. And when it is a very real artist with a great hold on the people, it is by so much the more a pity” (153, 165).

⁴⁵ See my Introduction, pp. 3–4 above for other contemporary estimates of Wells’s intellectual standing.

⁴⁶ Masterman was one of Hueffer’s closest friends; they would discuss politics over games of golf (Saunders 1:97, 369).

that intellectual life was perilous and modish: Masterman was parading the work that had led to the breakdown of Hueffer's relationship with Wells, *Tono-Bungay*, making of it not just an artistic but an intellectual *cause célèbre* and, to judge by word-count alone, of significantly greater impact on Masterman's thinking than *Spirit of the People*.⁴⁷ Hueffer's book may have been "clever and suggestive," but it had not warranted the exegesis devoted to Wells's latest and "greatest novel" in *Condition of England*:

The hero of his greatest novel reveals an experience fragmentary and disconnected in a tumultuous world. Mr. Wells can show that world in its rockings and upheavals, until beneath the seeming calm and conventionality of the surface view, is heard the very sound of the fractures and fallings; an age in the headlong rush of change. (C. Masterman 234–35)

And so on: this passage, introducing a three page discussion of the novel, is testament to Masterman's conviction of the "intellectual power" (Hueffer's phrase) of Wells's writing. With writers like Bernard Shaw and Hilaire Belloc, Masterman writes, Wells is one of the "qualified critics of the time" (237).

Wells may have taken the approval of such a figure as Masterman to suggest that the affirmative position on the role of art in social analysis and theorising about society was already well articulated; this may explain why he did not respond to Hueffer's article in 1909.⁴⁸ A review of *The Condition of England* in the *Review*'s August issue had noted how frequently Masterman had deferred to works of fiction in his discussion, finding it "one cheering sign of the time . . . that a prominent politician in a 'serious book' should quote with so much deference from so many novels" ("Review" 182). So there were precedents for Wells's "high and wide claims" for the novel; his lecture builds upon the intellectual role the novel seems to have enjoyed in certain circles early in the century. "The Contemporary Novel" is an effective response to James's attempts by correspondence to encourage Wells to take a more considered approach to the formal qualities of his novels. Wells takes a broader approach to the question of form, arguing in "The Contemporary Novel" that what *makes* the novel *a novel* is its unique capacity for depicting social structures, the interrelation of

⁴⁷ Saunders says Masterman "had been greatly impressed by *Tono-Bungay*, which he had begun reading in the *Review*" (1:252). See Saunders 1:195–98, 220–21, 231–2 for his discussion of Hueffer's trilogy and the problems Hueffer had with his publisher in advertising and selling the books. Lodge, "Tono-Bungay" is a discussion of Wells's 1909 book as a "Condition of England" novel.

⁴⁸ See also Wells on Masterman's support during the *Ann Veronica* controversy: he was one of a number of Wells's friends (they were both members of the Coefficients Club which met from 1902 to 1908; see Chapter 2, p. 86 note 47) who "came out stoutly for me and would have nothing to do with any social boycott" (*Experiment* 471–72). See Toye 180–81 for a discussion of the political (as well as personal and literary) significance of Masterman's approval.

characters and social contexts, and for interrogating socio-moral givens in a way that links the novel with what he terms the “enormous criticism” of morals and social conduct that characterises contemporary England. And to this extent “The Contemporary Novel” is Wells’s response to the *English Review* controversy over intellectual objectives in art as much as a response to James’s criticism of his novels.

But I think it is possible to go further and to suggest that the context of these debates fully determined the substantive issues for Wells and the nature of his response to them. In other words, “The Contemporary Novel” is Wells’s best formulation of his conception of the novel and the relationship between aesthetic and social objectives in fiction because, although Wells would later make additional statements of his conception, they are retrospective, taking the terms of reference out of context. Accordingly, Wells never improves on the 1911 formulation. Justifying this claim involves looking at a later formulation of his argument in the much-discussed section at the end of Chapter Seven of his autobiography, headed “Digression About Novels.”⁴⁹ In what follows, I argue that the rhetorical and argumentational strategies of Wells’s autobiographical account, notwithstanding that the “Digression” pursues issues that emerged from the debates explored so far, obscure his argument and have misled critics.

Autobiographies and waste-paper baskets

Perhaps the ultimate irony in the debate between Wells and James over the novel is not that Wells continued the debate many years after his interlocutor’s death (James died in 1916 while Wells’s *Experiment* was published in 1934), but that he did so in the form to which James was the most opposed: autobiography. In the “Digression,” Wells plays expositor and critic of his earlier ideas, quoting at length from “The Contemporary Novel” and from correspondence with James. To judge by the critical literature to date, the most interesting feature of the “Digression” is the metaphor Wells chooses to describe his approach to the novel, claiming to be “the outstanding instance among writers of fiction in English of the frame getting into the picture” (*Experiment* 495). The “frame” metaphor is part of his attempt to justify his approach to the novel in contrast to James. Critics writing on the “Digression” tend to read the frame metaphor as a reference to method, and are divided on whether James or Wells presented the better argument. However, little attention has been paid to the

⁴⁹ *Experiment in Autobiography* 487–504.

way Wells develops the frame metaphor in the “Digression.”⁵⁰

In this section, I consider the repudiative strategy of the “Digression,” where Wells makes a serious issue of never really having thought of “the Novel as an art form,” in the context of similar claims by Wells to have abandoned serious artistic objectives (*Experiment* 500). I agree with critics who find Wells to misrepresent himself and mislead his readers by denying a serious interest in art, concluding that it is difficult to distinguish between defensive and constructive gestures in the “Digression” as a result of his strategy in argument, and suggest that the repudiative strategy is an artefact of the ineluctably polemical context within which Wells’s views on art emerged.⁵¹

In the next section I examine the development of the “frame” metaphor in the context of what I am calling Wells’s “constructive” conception of the novel and the integration of social

⁵⁰ Examples of the methodological reading are Batchelor 119; Clausson 371–72; Lodge, “Tono-Bungay” 218; Keesey 85. See also pp. 44–46 below for a discussion. The view that James had the best of the debate is, in general, the prevailing one. The earliest example I have found is an unsigned review of *Boon* in the *New Statesman* (5 June 1915), which found the book poor and noted that the conception of literature propounded in the book was, despite the satire and ridicule, not clearly differentiated from James’s (“Provisional Thinking” 211). Edel and Ray assume James to have the upper hand in the contest, with Wells too “limited and earth-bound” to triumph over James’s astral *avant-garde* sensibilities (39). Schorer speaks for the prevailing mid-century view in his memorable finding that “as James grows for us . . . Wells disappears,” and the picture that develops is generally one in which Wells has less to say about art than the uses it should be put to, is less interested in medium than message (Schorer 72). Writing that Wells “subordinate[d] his art to his social message,” that he was a mere “writer” rather than a “dedicated artist like James or Proust,” Edel and Ray anticipate the argument in Karl who, examining correspondence between Wells and Conrad, claims that Wells even eschewed “language as a primary concern” on the way to producing an art that, as a “vehicle for his views,” was “functional, not artistic” (Edel and Ray 11; Karl 1050, 1061). It is hardly surprising, then, to find Lodge asserting that “most modern critics” would endorse the preference for James (“Tono-Bungay” 214); Fluet notes “how unwilling twentieth-century literary criticism has been to endorse his [Wells’s] objectives for the novel, preferring James’s version of novelistic professionalism as a way, at least in part, of isolating the novel as a worthy object for professional literary critical study” (289). There are attempts to ameliorate the account if not reverse its terms: Lodge’s chapter on *Tono-Bungay* is the best of these, but as early as 1915 Rebecca West (Cicely Fairfield, 1892–1983) was writing that Wells’s intellectual and “high and abstract” approach made James look complacently superficial, an unfair and no doubt biased critique (R. West 4; for accounts of West’s relationship with Wells see MacKenzie and MacKenzie *Time Traveller* 283–6, 339–41; Dickson 220–24, 248–51, 289–92); Forster weighed Wells’s technical deficiencies against his interest in “life” and concluded that “[m]y own prejudices are with Wells” (*Aspects of the Novel* 150); Keesey attempts to “subtilize” or relativise the apparent dichotomy of views in the Wells–James correspondence (80); Anderson finds James’s views on art to be “partial and necessarily limited,” too, and notes that both men “write out of an experience of acute imbalance between the inner world of the individual and the narrow and incompatible forms of society” (“Self and Society” 199, 212). My own feeling is that, as Lodge suggests, it would be derisible to claim Wells “was as great a novelist as James” (“Tono-Bungay” 215). Nonetheless, revisiting the debate is essential to understanding how Wells conceived of the role of the novelist in relation to society.

⁵¹ For claims that Wells misrepresented himself, see Ray, “Wells Tries” 118; Lodge, “Tono-Bungay” 215; Costa, *H. G. Wells* 132. I discuss the various positions in criticism on the matter below: see pp. 37–38.

with aesthetic issues. I argue that the change of figure, from the “scope” of “The Contemporary Novel” to the “frame” of the “Digression,” obscures the clarity of Wells’s essential position, a situation hardly helped by the fact that, while Wells uses the frame metaphor to secure his stake in artistic originality while defining his differences with James, he adopts the very metaphor used by James to describe his *own* method, in another text from 1909: James’s preface to *The Ambassadors*.⁵²

In the final section of this chapter I examine in greater detail Wells’s withdrawal from both his own substantive claims and the pressure applied by critics of his technique, into a rhetorical strategy that undermines entirely his earlier position on the novel’s “power of veracity.” The effect is to sabotage the compelling presentation in “The Contemporary Novel” of a defence of fiction as “the only medium” equipped to participate in the interrogation of social givens. This strategy brings the “Digression” into fundamental self-contradiction, with Wells attempting to bend the generic spectrum around on itself to equate fiction and biography while continuing, as a rhetorical ploy, to recognise a distinction between them. Because of the problems arising in Wells’s argument in the “Digression,” I end this chapter by concluding that the 1911 lecture on “The Contemporary Novel” is the superior of the two accounts as a statement of artistic purpose. This raises the possibility of reconstructing the development of Wells’s conception of the novel in Chapters 2 and 3, by examining the treatment of the issues that eventually comprise the argument Wells presents in the lecture, in his reviewing for the *Saturday* and his interventions in sociological and philosophical debates in the wake of the sociological speculations of *Anticipations*.

The characteristic difference between “The Contemporary Novel” and the autobiographical “Digression About Novels” is the repudiative strategy that interleaves the latter. Wells commences in a pensive tone at odds with the confident assurance of 1911 about social objectives in the novel and the prospect of defending “high and wide claims for it,” in league with the kinds of intellectual and socio-moral claims Hobson had outlined in “The Task of Realism” and which Masterman had attempted to demonstrate by deferring frequently to Wells’s novels in his study of *The Condition of England* (“Contemporary Novel” 860).⁵³ Here Wells explores material he says has accumulated “in a folder labelled ‘Whether I am a Novelist,’” material that “refuses to be simplified” and from which no more than “some

⁵² See note 10 above for details.

⁵³ See pp. 30–31 above.

few fragmentary observations” are likely to be salvaged (*Experiment* 487–88).⁵⁴ Then comes a frank litany of disclaimers: “I was disposed to regard a novel as about as much an art form as a market place or a boulevard”; “my so-called novels were artless self-revelatory stuff”; “I was not so much expanding the novel as getting right out of it”; “the larger part of my fiction was written lightly and with a certain haste”; “I have never been willing . . . to accept the Novel as an art form,” and so on (489, 494, 499, 500). He even admits that the novel’s scope is really narrower than he had hoped in 1911: “I never got ‘all life within the scope of the novel.’ (What a phrase! Who could?)” (496).

“Never” is too strong a word, at least as far as his claim about rejecting “the Novel as an art form” goes. Examining Wells’s reviewing for the *Saturday Review* and his creative writing between 1895 and 1910, Ray pieces together a “solid and creditable” conception of the novel, one that valued social realism, detached observation, fully developed character—all signs that Wells saw literature as a form of art (“Wells Tries” 112–13).⁵⁵ In Chapter 3 I examine in detail Wells’s developing conception of the novel in his *Saturday* reviewing, especially the relationship between his treatment of character and social contexts in his reading of contemporary fiction and his defence of the novel, in “The Contemporary Novel,” in terms of the depiction of the “subjective reality” made possible by certain kinds of narrative perspective, the emphasis on showing a character’s “proceedings” or depicting the relationship between character and social context, and a novel’s overall effect or “power of veracity” as a form of social realism (“Contemporary Novel” 863, 865, 872).⁵⁶ Far from presenting evidence that Wells was never willing “to accept the Novel as an art form,” the 1911 lecture is actually a distillation of the way in which Wells had conceived of the novel *as art* from the start of his career. At the centre of this conception Wells placed the representation of the effects of social forces, of ideas and institutions, on individuals; this forms the basis for his claim that the novel was “a very important and necessary thing indeed in that complicated system of uneasy adjustments and re-adjustments that is modern civilisation” (“Contemporary Novel” 860). From 1895 to 1911, Wells’s conception of the novel is consistent, and he consistently conceives of it in terms of what is unique to the novel

⁵⁴ Even the section heading, “Digression About Novels,” seems an off-hand choice for a professional novelist, though it soon becomes apparent that Wells wants nothing to do with what he terms “The Novel” or “the established novel”; it is unclear whether by “digression” Wells is referring to this passage in the autobiography or to the debate two decades earlier (*Experiment* 488, 497).

⁵⁵ See also the volume *H. G. Wells’s Literary Criticism* edited by Parrinder and Philmus.

⁵⁶ See especially pp. 125–29 below.

as an art form. What, then, does he mean when he says he “never” believed in the novel as art?

The question is important, because his repudiation of the earlier formulation is a strategy designed to give greater credence to the formulation presented in the “Digression,” and it bears directly upon the critical debate over which account is the more credible. But Wells’s repudiations of serious artistic purpose started well before 1934. As early as 1915 he had refused to recognise “The Novel” as customarily conceived or “Art” in its capitalised, sovereign form. In correspondence with James in the wake of the publication of *Boon*, where Wells had lampooned James’s method and criticism, he denied that he even aspired to the status of “artist.”⁵⁷ He wrote, “I had rather be called a journalist” and received by return post James’s wonderfully concise and justifiably famous statement: “It is art that *makes* life, makes interest, makes importance” (Edel and Ray 264, 267). The rejoinder never brought Wells around to James’s way of thinking: the claim to be a journalist, not an artist, became a refrain.⁵⁸ It is worth considering briefly what Wells was trying to achieve by setting up this

⁵⁷ Wells’s satire on James emphasises the contrast between Wells’s own expansive conception and James’s emphasis on selection and composition: “He tries to pick the straws out of the hair of Life before he paints her. . . . In practice James’s selection becomes just omission and nothing more. He omits everything that demands digressive treatment or collateral statement. For example, he omits opinions. In all his novels you will find no people with defined political opinions, no people with religious opinions, none with clear partisanship or with lusts or whims, none definitely up to any specific impersonal thing. . . . Having first made sure that he has scarcely anything left to express, he then sets to work to express it, with an industry, a wealth of intellectual stuff that dwarfs Newton. . . . It is a leviathan retrieving pebbles. It is a magnificent but painful hippopotamus resolved at any cost, even at the cost of its dignity, upon picking up a pea which has got into a corner of its den. Most things, it insists, are beyond it, but it can, at any rate, modestly, and with an artistic singleness of mind, pick up that pea” (*Boon* 104–08).

⁵⁸ The editors of the Wells–James correspondence say that Wells started “boasting that he was a journalist and nothing more” from 1911, but they do not provide a reference and I have not seen such a statement by Wells around this time (Edel and Ray 30). Wells’s “I had rather be called a journalist” letter to James was known outside his circle once Percy Lubbock published his 1920 volume of selected *Letters of Henry James*. Lubbock was permitted by Wells to print the passage in question between James’s two letters about *Boon*: see Lubbock 2:505. In the 1924 General Introduction to the Atlantic edition of his works, Wells opposed his work to “the processional dignity” of James’s “New York” edition, claiming for his own books that they *might* be, “in whole or in part,” *literature*, “but certainly . . . they are not Works of Art. It is far truer to call them Journalism than Art” (*Works* 1:x–xi). Then in *Democracy Under Revision* (1927) he would write, “I fall back upon *Journalist* as the least misleading description of my use in the world,” and go on to defend the epithet as an attempt “to express, in as bright and hard a manner as possible, a very definite view of the value of all literary effort, all literary and artistic effort. I am trying to express, in so far as my own activities go, my sense of the temporary nature, the transitory and personal nature, of every statement made by science and philosophy and of every beauty revealed by art” (8–9). An introduction written for Geoffrey West’s biography two years later finds Wells defending his position and his hasty and “haphazard” style by admitting he found the question of a work’s “qualities” less important than its ideas, an attitude at odds with the kind of modernism represented by James, Conrad, Hueffer, and Joyce: “I escaped from under their immense

opposition between journalism and art. On one hand, it is possible to recover a substantive assertion from what is seemingly a rejection of art, to read his claim to be a journalist as part of an attempt to define his conception of the artist's task. Or, one could argue that the stark opposition between journalism and art overstates the case, and is a symptom of the overall repudiative strategy that mars rather than improves his case after 1911. Either way, Wells's claim that the word was "the least misleading description of my use in the world" is hard to reconcile with the facts of the matter (*Democracy Under Revision* 8).

Both arguments are well represented in the critical literature. Some critics have tried to discharge Wells's journalistic protestations of a derogative reading and thus to mitigate the divisive journalist–artist schema. The argument is that Wells's claim to be a journalist was consistent with his views on art. For example, Parrinder and Philmus argue that by calling himself a journalist Wells meant "to express his belief that a writer must, first and above all, be responsive to the historical moment in which he finds himself" (185–86). Considering the emphasis on the depiction of "contemporary social development" in "The Contemporary Novel," this is not far-fetched (869). Parrinder rejects the critical strategy of distinguishing the "genuine artist" from the social reformer, prophet, propagandist or journalist, noting that such a strategy "overlooks the fact that [Wells's] first responsibility was not to art but to the message that spoke through it," but this reinstates the dualism in the work itself, imposing a distinction between "art" and "message" that is absent from Wells's formulation, which defines the novel in terms of the kinds of social "messages" it is best placed to disseminate ("Wells and the Literature of Prophecy" 6).⁵⁹ Wagar suggests Wells called himself a journalist not in order to reject art but because he was "devoted to exploring the ideas and issues of his time" (*Journalism and Prophecy* xiii). In such arguments the repudiation is reduced to a question of emphasis, raising a genuine possibility that by "journalism" Wells had in mind something no less "important and necessary" than the kind of art he argued for in "The Contemporary Novel" (860). But this is achieved at the cost of evacuating the term "art" of any content other than "message" or "ideas"; it is notable that Parrinder and Philmus use the generic

artistic preoccupations by calling myself a journalist" (G. West 13–14).

⁵⁹ Critics had used Wells's journalism against him before Ray's articles on Wells's reviewing and Wagar's anthology of Wells's *Journalism and Prophecy* made an alternative case. Weygandt's *A Century of the English Novel* (1925) has a chapter on "H. G. Wells, Journalist" in which, operating from Jamesian assumptions ("[s]electiveness is at the very basis of art"), Weygandt uses the term to derogate Wells's artistic achievement: Wells writes "long books with a minimum of story and a maximum of propagandist journalism," is "the 'star-reporter' of our day," even in his novels, and "has few of the qualities of the man of letters" (21–22, 404, 406).

term “writer” rather than attempting to defend the more loaded “artist”: these are terms that the editors of the Wells–James correspondence, at least, suppose to be at opposite ends of an evaluative scale.⁶⁰ A critic who assumes from the outset that the Jamesian principles, in which “art” and “message” are arguably just as intertwined, are the right ones, is unlikely to be convinced that Wells is worth a second look on the basis of a defence amounting to claims for his worth as a social historian.

The other way to look at Wells’s claim to be a journalist and not an artist is to read it not as an essential feature of his views on art but as an unfortunate consequence of his historical situation, an artefact of the polemic he engaged in with other authors. Several critics take this line. Ray, for example, discounts the claims as a “smoke screen” that “conceal[ed] . . . his earlier literary achievement” (“Wells Tries” 107, 118); Lodge finds Wells “doing *himself* injustice, affecting a literary barbarism which the skill of his own work belies,” the result of constant prodding by James (“Tono-Bungay” 215); Costa finds that Wells was “goaded . . . into overreacting” by disclaiming all interest in art (*H. G. Wells* 132).

However repressed by vociferous repudiation Wells’s interest in the novel as art was at the moment he penned the fateful line to James, it eventually returned to consciousness: early in 1919 he is found regretting the statement when asked for permission to publish his side of the correspondence about *Boon* in Percy Lubbock’s volumes of James’s letters (1920). He writes to his friend Arnold Bennett, whom Lubbock had approached with the request, worried that “[t]he publication of the correspondence . . . as it stands might entirely misrepresent my attitude towards our ‘art’” (D. Smith, *Correspondence* 3:5). What was this “attitude”? Overlooking the fact that Wells saw fit to enclose the term “art” in quotation marks, one might conjecture his attitude toward it consisted of the positive kinds of statements to be found in “The Contemporary Novel,” that art, as art, was important in so far as it functioned as social mediator and critique and in its constructive influence on socio-moral ideas. This was art specially defined; nonetheless, in its emphasis on developing character in the context of proceedings and on the distinction between the novel and all other kinds of writing, it was more art than reportage. This is why publishing the letter to James might “misrepresent” Wells’s attitude, however one feels about its terms, for in the fateful line he had drawn too stark an opposition between art and journalism and made more

⁶⁰ They oppose “the way of the writer like Wells or Bernard Shaw who subordinates his art to his social message” to “the way of the dedicated artist like James or Proust for whom art is the only valid means of encompassing and preserving human experience” (Edel and Ray 11).

than tacit the idea that he wanted little to do with the former.⁶¹

The letter to Bennett must be seen for what it is, a moment of vacillation soon overcome: Wells granted Lubbock permission to publish, and he was quickly back to repeating his “rather be called a journalist” refrain.⁶² Nonetheless, it is possible to distinguish between, on one hand, Wells’s attempt to fend off criticism made on Jamesian grounds by repudiating art outright and, on the other, his positive conception of art preceding such repudiation—which, fittingly, he formulated while he actually was a working journalist. The repudiative strategy, the disavowal of artistic significance, the apparent cleavage between journalism and art as mutually exclusive professions for writers: the entire syndrome is an artefact of the polemical context in which Wells’s views on art emerged and from which they cannot completely be separated. The fact is that Wells did not follow through on his fear that he was misrepresenting himself with such renunciation, opting for reaction over clarification after 1911.

Indeed, by the time Wells had established himself as a novelist, he was already pointing out the contrast between artistic and journalistic vocations, but with different emphasis, putting art before journalism. A letter to the *Daily Mail* from late 1906 finds him objecting to the Times Book Club’s methods in publishing lists and excluding books by authors whose publishers had not signed up to the Club’s charter. Writing of his work in progress (David Smith suggests the book in question is *Tono-Bungay*), Wells complained that he “had hoped to get it finished in 1907 by working straight on, but it is clear I must interrupt it to do some newspaper articles and things of that sort” (D. Smith, *Correspondence* 2:114; the first instalment of *Tono-Bungay* appeared in the *English Review* for December 1908). Here journalism comes in as a drab promise of financial security, not artistic preference or polemical denial. “I want very much to write novels,” Wells writes; “it is the best thing that I can do,” a remark that contrasts starkly with his claim that journalism was “the least misleading description of my use in the world” (D. Smith, *Correspondence* 2:114; *Democracy Under Revision* 8). In the later formulation, journalism replaces the novel as the medium he chooses to be known by, “least” appears where he had written “best” two decades earlier, and, most crucially, he retreats to passive acquiescence in the likelihood of being misunderstood, where earlier he asserted active participation in creative literary output as the basis for one’s professional identity:

⁶¹ Parrinder and Philmus note that Wells’s fear that the letter to James would misrepresent him “has proven to be totally justified” (185).

⁶² See note 58 above for its later appearances.

journalism may be the *least* misleading of possible epithets—but it is still misleading.

The 1906 letter also prefigures a term Wells would use to defend *Boon* in 1915. He writes that oblivion and bankruptcy were the likely outcomes of the Times Book Club's advertising policy. *Kipps* (1905) had not appeared on their "recent books" list, and Wells complained that it was "not in human nature" to look "remunerative special journalism" in the face while "writing and publishing novels that in all probability will be shied into the waste-paper box in the course of some fresh and still more idiotic development of 'book war'" (D. Smith, *Correspondence* 2:114).⁶³ In the 1915 letter to James a further transposition takes place: Wells now directly aligns journalism with the "waste-paper" he had earlier feared his novels might become. "*Boon* is just a waste-paper basket," he writes to James; "it was while I was turning over some old papers that I came upon it, found it expressive and went on with it last December. I had rather be called a journalist than an artist, that is the essence of it" (Edel and Ray 264).⁶⁴ If Wells has been misunderstood, part of the blame must lie with his many contradictions and denials, the results of a tendency to polemicise and thus to embed the critical terms, concepts, or relations (here, the distinction between "journalist" and "artist") in a context in which they can be picked over but not picked out and treated as signposts to a position well clear of whatever disagreement he was involved in at the time. The need to defend and further promote the intellectual value of the novel was an important aspect of the personal and professional circumstances "The Contemporary Novel" was written under. But in 1934, the polemic loomed too large in hindsight and, attempting to piece his "few fragmentary observations" back together, Wells was provoked to disclaim and renounce where a quarter-century earlier he had done all he could to deliver a more constructive formulation.

Reconstructing the frame

Wells's repudiative strategy is the consequence of polemical engagement with and by his

⁶³ See note 16 above for details on the "book war" of 1906–08. Hammond notes that in the four years between starting and finishing *Tono-Bungay* Wells was distracted by a number of "other projects—the Fabian affray, the writing of *In the Days of the Comet* and *New Worlds for Old*, a visit to the United States in 1906, and much journalism and pamphleteering" (*Wells Companion* 148–49). See also Ray, "Wells Tries" 122–23.

⁶⁴ James responded, "[y]our comparison of the book to a waste-paper basket strikes me as the reverse of felicitous, for what one throws into that receptacle is exactly what one *doesn't* commit to publicity and make the affirmation of one's estimate of one's contemporaries by. I should liken it much rather to the preservative portfolio or drawer in which what is withheld from the basket is savingly laid away" (Edel and Ray 265).

contemporaries. His claim to be a journalist is misleading, exaggerating the distinction between his position and James's, appearing to disavow all interest in art, however defined. It led to such denials in the "Digression" as that he had "never been willing . . . to accept the Novel as an art form," a statement completely at odds with the evidence presented by the reviews written for the *Saturday* and critical findings on Wells's own novels up to *Tono-Bungay* (*Experiment* 500). As I argue in the next section, such statements are part of a fatal tendency in the "Digression" to acquiesce in a characteristic critique of Wells's fiction.⁶⁵

However much the "journalist" epithet fails as a substantive formulation of artistic or authorial purpose, it was part of Wells's broader strategy to stake out alternative territory and mark out alternative objectives. The figurative strategies he employs in "The Contemporary Novel" and the "Digression" should also be read as part of this differentiating strategy. In the 1911 lecture he distinguishes between socially constructive art and aesthetic preoccupation, between the expansive approach he defined with the term "scope" and what struck him as the restrictive, constraining formalism urged by James. There he reacted against "restrictions imposed . . . by the fierce pedantries of those who would define a general form" for the novel ("Contemporary Novel" 861). His conception of the novel was not defined *in vacuo* but in opposition to what he argued were constraints of formal preoccupation compromising socially constructive objectives for the novel. The "scope" figure works well in this context, suggesting scrutiny directed outward to social rationales rather than inward to formal ones; it can be read as the opposite of James's emphasis on "composition," the aesthetic ideal of beauty exchanged for one of social efficacy.

The substitution of "frame" for "scope" in the "Digression" is a rhetorical move that appears to have been intended to clarify and develop the earlier argument (about which he writes, in the "Digression," "I was feeling my way") but ultimately serves to undermine the

⁶⁵ See pp. 56–60 below for a discussion of the charge of autobiography, the characteristic critique I allude to above, by critics of Wells's fiction. I focus exclusively upon the "Digression" in isolation from the rest of Wells's autobiography because it provides his response to the debate with James. However, the issues raised later in this chapter regarding Wells's endorsement of biography as a basis for the fictional depiction of character (see pp. 59–60 below), and a claim in *Mankind in the Making* (1903) that "biography" provides "facts of infinite suggestion" while novels themselves are "experiments in the 'way of looking at' various cases and situations," raise the possibility of approaching the text of Wells's autobiography with the kinds of principles that, in Chapter 3, I claim characterise Wells's literary criticism. In particular, one might pose the question of how Wells's own *Experiment in Autobiography* compares to his fictional practice, itself frequently derided by critics as autobiographical (*Mankind* 302). Bergonzi makes this brief remark on the matter: "Certainly the *Experiment in Autobiography* is more real, satisfying and interesting than any of Wells's attempts at novel-writing after 1910" (*Situation* 196).

differentiation in the earlier formulation between “scope” and “method” (*Experiment* 497). In this section I argue that the scope and frame metaphors refer to the same conception of artistic practice: Wells’s attempt to define artistic objectives in social terms. I then show that the change in figurative vehicle weakens his defence of a constructive, socially-engaged art in opposition to the preoccupation with form, encouraging misreading the frame metaphor as a reference to method and glossing over the essential character of Wells’s conception of artistic objectives. I finish by suggesting that Wells defines his novel-writing method in the “Digression” as a kind of argument, further differentiating between the intellectual objectives he endorses and the purely aesthetic approaches to novel-writing he rejects.

The term “frame” first appears in the “Digression” as part of a discussion about social values, with Wells isolating moral certainty as the characteristic quality of the nineteenth-century English novel. Its most famous practitioner, Walter Scott, “saw events . . . as a play of individualities in a rigid frame of values” (here Wells introduces the metaphor), values that were beyond question because they seemed essential and eternal (494).⁶⁶ Scott “had hardly a doubt in him of what was right or wrong” and from his time on throughout the nineteenth century “the art of fiction floated on this same assumption of social fixity” (494). Wells continues (the passage is well known):

The novel in England was produced in an atmosphere of security for the entertainment of people who liked to feel established and safe for good. Its standards were established within that apparently permanent frame and the criticism of it began to be irritated and perplexed when, through a new instability, the splintering frame began to get into the picture.

I suppose for a time I was the outstanding instance among writers of fiction in England of the frame getting into the picture. (494–95)

To begin with, the “frame” is simply the “atmosphere of security” existing by virtue of presumed moral certainty, a presumption passively reflected by the novel and happily accepted by its readers. At some stage between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries this sense of security and assurance of social cohesion starts to dissipate into instability, the novel begins to grapple with the new circumstances, and critics, Wells suggests, become increasingly exasperated—irritated or perplexed by a substitution of insecurity for moral certainty in the novel (especially in Wells’s novels, if his claim that he was the “outstanding instance” is allowed).

⁶⁶ Keeseey misreads this passage, turning Wells’s brief discussion about Scott into a direct reference to James (85). In Chapter 3 I show that the argument about social fixity and its disintegration in the “Digression” first appears in Wells’s *Saturday* reviewing in his preference for the “novel of types,” depicting characters in antagonism with socio-moral givens: see pp. 121–22 below.

However dubious this is as social history (or even history of literary criticism or an account of Wells's place in literary history), it reprises the thesis of 1911.⁶⁷ He had explained to the Times Book Club that "formerly there was a feeling of certitude about moral values and standards of conduct that is altogether absent to-day" ("Contemporary Novel" 867). Though he had provided a more genetic account in that lecture, attributing the dissolution of this "feeling of certitude" to the "conflict of authority against criticism," the "intellectual spring" or interrogation of faith, standard, and rule, the substantive point is the same: the frame comprises a set of values, a moral and social scheme, the source of "the ideas that lead to conduct" (868, 867). Wells introduces the "frame" metaphor to denote the complex social "field" or "whole" he had gestured toward in his "high and wide" claims about "scope," the social situations, cultural values, historical and political developments from which novels, novelists, critics and their standards cannot, as he argued in 1911, ever really detach themselves (860, 873). He implies that critics are somehow ideologically retarded, "perplexed" by the confrontation with ideas in art, a new take on his claim in 1911 that "[e]very art nowadays must steer its way between the rocks of trivial and degrading standards, and the whirlpool of arbitrary and irrational criticism," between critical standards either too expansive or too restrictive (861). But his basic meaning is the same: the "frame" of the "Digression" is the "scope" of "The Contemporary Novel" in new array.

James had used the same metaphor in the 1909 *Ambassadors* preface. Here James discusses the "false position" his protagonist Lambert Strether finds himself in—his sudden appreciation, surrounded by "the many persons of great interest" gathered at a garden party in Paris, that he has made a mistake in life (*Art of the Novel* 315, 308). James writes, "the false position for him . . . was obviously to have presented himself at the gate of that boundless menagerie primed with a moral scheme of the most approved pattern which was yet framed to break down on any approach to vivid facts" (315). Here frame and value appear as vehicle and tenor of a metaphor, as they would a quarter-century later in Wells's description of the "rigid frame of values" in Scott. But there is a crucial difference in how Wells and James use

⁶⁷ "Wells's literary history . . . is somewhat over-dramatized . . . Wells was not as revolutionary as he thought" (Lodge, "Tono-Bungay" 218). Batchelor notes that Wells glosses over historical realities in his depiction of unchallenged moral certainty in the nineteenth century (119). Scheick reads Wells to be saying that the "rigid frame of values" existed up until World War I (*Splintering* 24, quoting Wells). This seems unlikely: the consensus among critics is that what was "outstanding" in Wells as an imaginative writer is absent from novels after 1911, well before the outbreak of war. See Introduction, pp. 3–5 above.

the figure. For Wells the frame is something that changes over time and is socio-historical; the frame breaks down seemingly as the result of an historical process, with primarily social repercussions; these repercussions become subject matter for novelists. For James, on the other hand, the frame fractures in an instant and has psychological repercussions; it breaks down in the present as value collides with fact (for Strether, his Woollett, Massachusetts “philosophy” seems inadequate and false suddenly and completely: 316). The frame’s breaking-down is a lesson in life for James; for Wells it is a lesson about society, social structure, the shape of historical change.⁶⁸

Another important difference arises in a further use of the frame metaphor by James. In a remark concluding a letter responding to *Boon* (6 July 1915; it was James’s penultimate letter to Wells), James wrote that “[t]he fine thing about the fictional form to me is that it opens such widely different windows of attention; but that is just why I like the window so to frame the play and the process!” (Edel and Ray 263).⁶⁹ This is not the same metaphor; James makes no reference to a moral scheme or a personal philosophy. Instead, the reference is to James’s method; the framing of “the play and the process” is the imposition of form on content through sensitive selection which he finds lacking in *Boon*; he wishes Wells’s “picture were painted with a more searching brush” and asserts, in a phrase anticipating the famous formula of his next and final letter to Wells, that “interest must be exquisitely made and created” (262, 263).

It is impossible to draw any conclusions about the effect of these statements on Wells, except to say that he was provoked to respond with “an immense embarrassment” before going on to describe *Boon* as “just a waste-paper basket” and his own practice as journalism, stressing too that while James saw literature “as an end, to me literature is a means, it has a use” (Edel and Ray 264). His demeanour in this letter is, as usual, to state his sense of artistic purpose, which consistently is to make the kind of technical preoccupations of critical importance to James a side-issue.

But Wells’s critics have tended to read his use of the frame metaphor, especially his claim to be “the outstanding instance among writers of fiction in England of the frame getting into

⁶⁸ James uses similar language to describe his impression of Wells’s technique. In the letter on *Machiavelli*, James describes Wells as “a far-flaring even though turbid and smoky lamp, projecting the most vivid and splendid golden splotches, *creating* them about the field—shining scattered innumerable morsels of a huge smashed mirror” (Edel and Ray 127).

⁶⁹ See Clausson for an argument that Wells’s short story “Through a Window” (1894) “anticipates the terms of the later debate with James” and is even Jamesian in its technique (372).

the picture” in the “Digression” (*Experiment* 495), as a reference to novel-writing method.⁷⁰ Bergonzi quotes the remarks as part of his contention that “Wells’s striking image of the splintering frame getting into the picture, though meant to apply to his own fictional activities, can also refer to the great Modernist innovations in twentieth-century fiction,” leading to a survey of such “autobiographical fiction” and other interrogations and disruption of the “fictional illusion” in works by Joyce, Proust, Nabokov, Borges, Frayn, Lodge, and Barth, books which challenge “the distinction between fiction and other kinds of writing” and “are all examples of what Wells called ‘the frame getting into the picture,’ where the author’s act of writing is included in the field of the novel” (*Situation* 197, 210). Here, Wells’s figure becomes a motif for method in twentieth-century fiction. Discussing the same passage, Batchelor suggests that somewhere between “permanent” and “splintering,” “the metaphor changes and the frame ceases to refer to the structure, or moral system, supporting society and refers instead to the ‘container,’ so to speak, of a work of art, part of which splinters and becomes involved with the work’s subject” (119). This is not, I suggest, the “wholly appropriate image for Wells’s own practice” Batchelor claims (119). That this is so is recognised tacitly in the very assertion Batchelor makes here: the frame “becomes involved” in the work as subject matter, he writes, and selection of material alone does not account for an entire method or “practice.”⁷¹ Furthermore, such a position is challenged by a passage later in the “Digression.” Returning to the question of character that animated so much of his discussion with James,⁷² Wells writes:

[e]xhaustive character study is an adult occupation, a philosophical occupation. So much of my life has been a prolonged and enlarged adolescence, an encounter with the world in general, that the observation of character began to play a leading part in it only in my later years. It was necessary for me to reconstruct the frame in which individual lives as a whole had to be lived, before I could concentrate upon any of the individual problems of fitting them into this frame. (501–02)

Here he draws a distinction between two processes: reconstructing the frame surrounding individual lives on one hand, and fitting lives into this frame on the other. One necessarily precedes the next, according to Wells: reconstructing the frame is the primary task for the

⁷⁰ In addition to the examples discussed in this paragraph see Lodge, “Tono-Bungay” 218; Keesey 85; Clausson 371–72.

⁷¹ The claim is tantamount to arguing that content equals form. This is the kind of claim Wells was prone to making: see my discussion of his journalism-art division, pp. 36–40 above.

⁷² For example, his argument in “The Contemporary Novel” that the distinctive value of the novel lies in characterisation, and that character was relative to a situation or to “proceedings” and not an end in itself (863); see also the correspondence between James and Wells on *Marriage* (1912) and *The Passionate Friends* (1913) (Edel and Ray 165–69, 172–77) and my brief discussion on pp. 51–52 below.

novelist (or perhaps just for Wells, who writes in a more directly personal manner here than he had in the 1911 lecture). Significantly, contrary to readings that have Wells using the term “frame” to refer to method seven pages earlier, here the word continues to refer to everything in society that surrounds art and the artist, the situation in which art and artist find themselves, “the world in general” from which some semblance of order and understanding and the ideas informing social relationships arise in a process of “encounter.” All that changes as Wells develops the frame metaphor is its state, as it passes from rigid fixity to disintegration, then on to reconstruction; again, Wells is making a socio-historical point, not a formal-aesthetic one, though it has implications for Wells’s approach to novel-writing. But if “reconstruct[ing] the frame” is *one step* in Wells’s method, then “frame” is certainly no synonym for “method.”

The tendency to interpret the metaphor as a reference to technique cannot be attributed entirely to wilful misreading. Part of the blame rests with Wells’s choice of metaphor, for “frame” is an odd way to mark out his differences with regard to James’s preoccupation with composition, form, artistic limitation and constraint, ideas falling within the connotative orbit of such a word as “frame,” especially given the fact that James used the same figure in correspondence to Wells to highlight Wells’s laxity in method, his *discomposed* approach in *Boon*, in terms both of social etiquette and formal finish. Some of the blame must also lie with Wells’s penchant for fudging the distinction between different, even conflicting meanings of the term, between the frame’s reconstruction, a phase preoccupied with social organization, and its use as a technique of characterisation, a phase of artistic preoccupation. It is a sign of Wells’s struggle to articulate his vision for the novel clearly as late as 1934.

Cavilling over whether or not at some semantic level frame and method amount to the same thing would probably out-digress the “Digression.” In the long run, Wells could not have written anything without making some methodological assumptions. So what general conclusion can be drawn about the kind of method Wells had in mind? In the “Digression” he writes, “I did not worry much about finish,” but defends this with the observation that “the general reader” was not particularly interested in it, either: “What we wanted was a ventilation of the point at issue” (497).⁷³ This point, the idea motivating Wells here and in the 1911 lecture, is the point of intersection between society and the individual; the objective it

⁷³ Compare James, in the preface to *The Ambassadors*, on “one’s inevitable consciousness too of the dire paucity of readers ever recognising or ever missing positive beauty” (*Art of the Novel* 319).

gives rise to is the imperative to write novels that intersect with social situations analytically, creatively, constructively. This *is* method, in a sense, but a sociological kind of method rather than an aesthetic one, an argument about society rather than a mode of representation, concerned more with points and issues than “finish,” more interested in getting across ideas about social relationships and forms of social organization than being championed as “Art” with a capital “A.”⁷⁴ Wells’s constructive conception of art elevates social efficacy over aesthetic achievement as an ideal. This does not mean Wells has “totally disregarded” method, as the editors of the Wells–James correspondence claim, nor that method amounts to nothing more than superficial polish, as the offhand reference to “finish” suggests (Edel and Ray 26; Wells, *Experiment* 497).⁷⁵ Wells’s novels could not have been written without adopting choices dictated by criteria that amount to a kind of method. This does not entail that his writing *about* the novel should be methodological in nature. It means only that Wells emphasises social objectives in the novel and abandons any attempt to defend an aesthetic position in which social objectives have no part to play.

To summarise: with both the “scope” metaphor of 1911 and the “frame” of 1934, Wells attempts to differentiate between a kind of imaginative writing that integrates social and aesthetic issues, and one self-consciously formal. Without intending to make any detailed evaluative claims about which of these two conceptions of the novel is responsible for the better novels (such a claim would be “framed” in advance by the long-standing tendency of twentieth-century criticism to prefer formal sophistication to theorising and argument dressed up as a novel), I have shown that the “Digression,” considered as an example of Wells’s argument for constructive art, is deficient.⁷⁶ By substituting metaphors Wells blurs the distinctions formulated in 1911. He repeats a term James used specifically in reference to method in his own writing and correspondence with Wells: the “frame.” Whether this was

⁷⁴ As Keesey points out (83), Wells uses the phrase “the argument of the book” as a synonym for “ventilation of the point at issue” (*Experiment* 497). He also defended his use of the discussion novel form in these terms: “I could not see how, if we were to grapple with new ideas, a sort of argument with the reader, an explanation of the theory that is being exhibited, could be avoided. I began therefore to make my characters indulge in impossibly explicit monologues and duologues” (498; qtd. in Keesey 83–84). See also p. 55 below.

⁷⁵ Wells also used the term in a letter of September 1913 in response to James’s reflections on Wells’s new novel, *The Passionate Friends*: “it is when you write to me out of your secure and masterly *finish*, out of your golden globe of leisurely (yet not slow) and infinitely *easy* accomplishment that the sense of my unworthiness and rawness is most vivid” (Edel and Ray 177).

⁷⁶ See note 50 above for representative views on the question of which conception leads to the better artistic outcomes.

intentional on Wells's part or not, the effect has been to encourage what I have argued are misinterpretations of the "Digression" that find Wells to be making substantive claims about method. I have suggested that such claims were a minor part of Wells's argument in the "Digression," and have offered an alternative reading of the frame metaphor, stressing its continuity with the earlier "scope" figure.

Because the terms of argument are context-dependent, it might come as no surprise that Wells's distinctions between constructive social efficacy and formal preoccupation in the novel are less coherent in the "Digression" than he had rendered them in the 1911 lecture. But I think it is possible to refocus attention on Wells's argument for socially constructive art in the "Digression," by viewing it through the lens of the earlier debate. Reconstructing the frame of social forces, trying to contribute to or intervene in social development by presenting a subjective account of experience in the form of an "argument" or a critical engagement with social givens: such is Wells's contribution, at least in theoretical terms, to what Hobson called the "modes of demonstration" of contemporary realist literature, "challenging the fundamental assumptions" of art ("Task of Realism" 550). It is Wells's commitment to refuse the narrowing of scope Hueffer had claimed as the sole defensible quarter for art, his point of difference with Jamesian limiting and refining "composition" or formal preoccupation, and in this sense the "Digression" is compatible with "The Contemporary Novel."

But this focus is not easily maintained. In the next section I look at how Wells disrupts his attempt to reprise the earlier context-dependent argument in order to reframe his position; in the process he changes—actually, he contradicts—the fundamental terms of reference and points of difference with his critics, including James. Again, the differences between the 1911 and 1934 accounts amount to a denial of the earlier position, but without developing a coherent alternative. I conclude that the new argument in the "Digression" begs a number of questions crucial to understanding Wells's position and is ultimately selfdefeating.

A portrait or a patch-up

In this section I argue that the "Digression" undercuts Wells's defence of the novel's singular value, in "The Contemporary Novel," in terms of its "power of veracity" (872). Wells claims a breach has opened between critical and artistic standards (in the famous passage on the "splintering frame" he claims critics were not just irritated but *perplexed* by new developments in the novel), putting artists (or perhaps just himself) in the van of both artistic and social progress, reinforcing the earlier argument that the novel is specially placed to

engage constructively with society. But he undermines this claim by acquiescing in, where earlier in the century he had vigorously engaged with, one of the characteristic refrains of his critics: that his characters were thinly-veiled autobiographical entities where they were not two-dimensional mouthpieces for his socio-moral views. The result is to undermine the claim for the novel's special status. This is a significant point. His formulation of the novel's "power of veracity," its unique ability to present character in context, to reveal the working of social forces upon individuals, is fundamental to his defence of the novel from his reviewing for the *Saturday* onwards. As I examine in the following chapters of this thesis, it provides the rationale for his attempt to assign a central role for fiction in the sociological study of contemporary life in the wake of his own foray into sociological speculation with *Anticipations*, and it forms the basis upon which Wells overcame his own scepticism about the possibility of constructive social effects in fiction. In other words, to accept the "Digression" as the classic statement of Wells's conception of the novel is not just to note a discrepancy between accounts, but to accept that it challenges the model Wells spent more than fifteen years developing, from the time he joined the *Saturday* in 1895 to his lecture to the Times Book Club in 1911. The repercussions of accepting *that* include admitting that Wells, in his autobiography, rejects a consistent and long-standing theoretical conception of his own making. Such are the stakes. For the reasons I now present, I suggest it is in "The Contemporary Novel," not the "Digression," that one encounters Wells's most compelling formulation of his conception of the novel.

The contradiction, the undercutting and the acquiescence, are consequences of Wells's attempt to deflect James's criticism of his novels by arguing from analogy with painting in the "Digression." In a move reminiscent of the shift from the yielding posture in the April 1911 letter to James ("I wholly agree and kiss the rod") to the assertive argument presented in the Times Book Club address the following month ("We are going to write about it all"), Wells qualifies his technical *mea culpa* (admitting the "main indictment . . . that I sketch out scenes and individuals . . . crudely") with a statement of aims (it was done crudely "in order to get on to a discussion of relationships") consistent with his privileging of argument over form (Edel and Ray 130; Wells, "Contemporary Novel" 873; *Experiment* 493). Then comes the analogising (this is two pages prior to the introduction of the frame metaphor):

The important point which I tried to argue with Henry James was that the novel of completely consistent characterization arranged beautifully in a story and painted deep and round and solid, no more exhausts the possibilities of the novel, than the art of Velazquez exhausts the possibilities of the painted picture. (493)

The main theme of the Wells-James correspondence is artistic difference, in a context of

respectful epistolary etiquette; Wells had, by the time of James's death eighteen years before *Experiment in Autobiography* was published, made public his account of those differences; so his attempt here to relativise the Jamesian novel, to argue that for all his achievement James had hardly exhausted the genre's possibilities, is not surprising. What is unusual at first glance is the analogy between James and Velasquez. What is the effect of this analogy on Wells's distinction between "completely consistent characterisation" and "a discussion of relationships"? To answer this question I examine precedents in Wells and James for the painting analogy in my attempt to clarify Wells's "important point," and argue that, once more, it was in the 1911 lecture that Wells made his best attempt to argue the point with James.

James had conceived of characterisation on analogy with painting in the 1909 *Ambassadors* preface, writing that he "rejoiced in the promise of a hero so mature," because "thickened motive and accumulated character" bestowed a surfeit of material upon "the painter of life" (*Art of the Novel* 310). But he had also written on Velasquez and used Velasquez's work in his own. Velasquez's portrait of Pope Innocent X appears in James's story "Daisy Miller" (1879) as a study in analogy and contrast related to Winterbourne's logic-chopping preoccupation with the alternatives of Daisy's innocence or guilt.⁷⁷ In an unsigned art review published in the Boston *Atlantic Monthly* for November 1874, James had presented his thoughts on the portrait. In general he found Velasquez "mighty in imitation," but this was "not the limit of his power" for the Spaniard had "a style which belongs to his conception" of his subjects "quite as much as to their real appearance" (*Painter's Eye* 84). In defining the style James used one of the terms that would recur in Wells's analogy sixty years later: Velasquez has "a noble gravity and solidity [sic]; added to his magnificent handling it makes him one of the most powerful of painters" (84). Whether he meant to or not, Wells had chosen an artist familiar to and admired by James, and even appropriated aspects of James's description.⁷⁸

There are also precedents in Wells for the analogy. He has George Boon attack James's

⁷⁷ See Tintner, who claims that James's knowledge of art through criticism and visits to galleries "contributed to his technique as a storyteller," for a discussion (64, 66).

⁷⁸ Examples of James's art criticism, which appeared variously in the *Atlantic*, *Nation*, *New York Tribune*, *Century*, and *Harper's Magazine* and *Weekly* between 1872 and 1897, can be found in James, *The Painter's Eye*. The *Atlantic Monthly* article was headed "The Duke of Montpensier's Pictures in Boston" (*Painter's Eye* 79–87). Tintner notes that the passage on Velasquez, which includes thoughts on the portrait's composition and Velasquez's use of colour, was written from memory (65).

Times Literary Supplement articles (“The Younger Generation” essay of 1914), arguing they amount to “one sustained demand for the picture effect” in “denial of the sweet complexity of life,” before drawing the following conclusion about James’s method: “James sets himself to pick the straws out of the hair of Life before he paints her” (*Boon* 103–04).⁷⁹ Then, in the letter of 8 July 1915 in which Wells would claim to “rather be called a journalist than an artist,” he sharpened his perception of the differences with James to a fine (and by now familiar) point, distinguishing between James’s aesthetic preoccupations and his own more utilitarian preoccupations: “To you literature like painting is an end, to me literature like architecture is a means, it has a use” (Edel and Ray 264).⁸⁰ The alternatives were art for art’s sake, or art with a “use”—art with a capital “A,” or constructive art. No mutual exclusives, these were alternate “possibilities of the novel”—this was the “point” he “tried to argue” with James (*Experiment* 493).

Where did this argument take place? Recall that Wells claimed it was about “the novel of completely consistent characterization arranged beautifully in a story and painted deep and round and solid” not exhausting “the possibilities of the novel” (493). There are six places Wells could have conducted such an argument, to consider just the published account of the years between 1911 and 1915. (All references in the rest of this paragraph are to Edel and Ray. The private conversations between Wells and James are, of course, also a factor, but there is no record of them.) Item one is Wells’s letter responding to James’s criticism of *Machiavelli*. There Wells gave the appearance of conceding to James’s critique, declaring he would abandon first-person technique (Edel and Ray 130). Next came letters exchanged after the publication of *Marriage* (1912). James claimed he read the novel “with a complete abdication” of all technical prejudices, but protested anyway that the protagonist of the book was Wells, not Trafford or Marjory Pope: “your ‘story,’ through the five hundred pages, says more to me than theirs” (167); Wells responded (item two) by warning James to expect worse

⁷⁹ Wells also has his fictional novelist Boon put a theory of literature in the mouth of one of his characters, Hallery (the name is vaguely reminiscent of “Wells”), whose “idea of literature is something tremendously comprehensive, something that pierces always down towards the core of things, something that carries and changes all the activities of the race. This sort of thing” (*Boon* 99). See Batchelor for a brief discussion (116–21). Parrinder and Philmus compare Boon’s theory, which includes the statement that “if the novel is to follow life it must be various and discursive,” with Wells’s (Parrinder and Philmus 186; Wells, *Boon* 104). The editor of correspondence between James and Edith Wharton (1862–1937) compares Boon’s theory to “Wharton’s basic position regarding the art of fiction” (Powers 8).

⁸⁰ I quote James’s wish that Wells’s “picture [in *Boon*] were painted with a more searching brush,” p. 44 above (Edel and Ray 262).

with the next book, which would be “bad in form, mixed pickles and I know it” (169). Having read this next book, *The Passionate Friends* of 1913, James again chafed at Wells’s “attachment to the autobiographic form,” arguing that Mary’s character was “foreshortened” and reduced to Stratton’s perspective upon her (174–75). Wells responded (item three in my list) by calling James “the soul of generosity” despite the criticism and claimed: “My art is abortion—on the shelves of my study stand a little vain-gloriously—thirty-odd premature births” (176–77). Fourth came James’s articles on “The Younger Generation” (1914). Here James gave Wells no quarter, protesting that compositional unity was a luxury “sought . . . in vain” in Wells’s novels (186). Wells “tak[es] all knowledge for his province” and refuses to impose order on his material, writes James (189). He indulges in his own subtly derisive analogising, reducing the intellectual in Wells to the scatological: “The more he [Wells] knows and knows, or at any rate learns and learns . . . the greater is our impression of his holding it good enough for us, such as we are, that he shall but turn out his mind and its contents upon us by any free familiar gesture and as from a high window forever open” (190). Wells’s response was to reciprocate with the satire, ridicule, and “harsh antagonism,” to use his own phrase, of *Boon* (264). But still there was no “argument,” if that word is taken to mean a patient attempt to derive a conclusion from premises.⁸¹ There is still a fifth item, the correspondence about *Boon*. That, too, is reactive, achieving only a differentiation between the two possibilities for art as Wells saw it, art that was an “end” in itself, and art that “has a use,” before positing a third way: art, like *Boon*, that was “just a waste-paper basket,” end and use in one (264). Not only is there no argument as such, there is not a word about character *per se* in any of these responses. Nothing on character, so no development of, no argument about, the distinction between character and “relationships,” a distinction Wells says in the “Digression” was the “important point” in his debate with James, and which, as I have been arguing, is fundamental to Wells’s conception of the novel (*Experiment* 493).

This brings me back to the one document not listed above, the May 1911 lecture on “The Contemporary Novel.” There Wells did not so much *dismiss* the idea of what he then termed “well-conceived character” as *define* its interest “in watching its proceedings” rather than “knowing its destiny” (“Contemporary Novel” 863). He shifted the emphasis from

⁸¹ A point made by the anonymous *New Statesman* reviewer, who found that the theory of literature propounded by Wells-Boon-Hallery was distinguished inadequately from James’s conception of his art (“Provisional Thinking” 211).

character as conceived by a novelist like James, to the relations between individuals and social forces. This *was* an argument with premises leading to conclusions: the novelist deals with ideas, the novel is a study of conduct, it is an instrument of socio-historical change, “the only medium” capable of adequate treatment of the problems of “social development,” and *therefore* the novelist must be freed from the constraining preoccupations of form and open his medium to “the whole of human life” (869, 873). Between 1911 and 1915, the Times Book Club lecture was the only occasion on which, even though he did not name his interlocutor, Wells really *argued* with James.⁸² The other documents, the correspondence and the attack in *Boon*, are either self-deprecatingly evasive or aggressively reactive.⁸³

Wells does present an argument in the “Digression,” too, and I have tried to show above that, overlooking the repudiative strategy and substitution of metaphors that obscure his argument, the premises are broadly the same as those of 1911.⁸⁴ Are the conclusions the same? Not at all. In 1911 he had argued that the novel boasted a “power of veracity” that set it above the “superficial fact” of history, biography, and autobiography (872). He meant it had the potential to make its readers understand and sympathise, to see the connections between moral conduct, the workings of the intellect, and the shaping forces of social and historical development, by encountering character in context. The correlative point is that other kinds of writing like biography do not have this effect of “veracity.” However, in the “Digression” Wells contradicts the earlier argument and the broad distinction between fiction and biography. The 1934 account raises more questions about Wells’s conception of the novel than it answers; Wells ultimately fails to provide convincing grounds for preferring the new argument over the old. What is at stake is no less than Wells’s fundamental claim that the novel had a role to play in “contemporary social development” (“Contemporary Novel” 869).

Reviewing the argument in “The Contemporary Novel,” in the “Digression” Wells writes (the passage comes a few lines after he introduces the analogy as quoted above):

I might have made a good case by asserting that fiction was necessarily fictitious through and through, and that the real analogy to Velazquez who painted straight from dwarfs and kings,

⁸² Here I agree with D. Smith who finds the lecture Wells’s “strongest attack on Jamesian ideas on writing” (*Correspondence* 2:296 note 1). It is the strongest for being the best argued case.

⁸³ It should be noted here that although he added the chapter “Of Art, Of Literature, Of Mr. Henry James” in 1915, Wells temporarily recommenced work on the *Boon* manuscript in the wake of the controversies of 1911: see his preface, *Works* vol. 13.

⁸⁴ For a discussion of Wells’s repudiative strategy in the “Digression” and elsewhere, see pp. 35–40 above. I argue the general claims of both accounts are largely identical on pp. 40–43.

would be biography, character drawn straight from life and not an invented story. (*Experiment* 493)

In the earlier passage he drew a comparison between James and Velasquez on grounds that both “painted deep and round and solid” (493).⁸⁵ Now he disturbs the terms of analogy and introduces a fundamental ambiguity, not unlike the alternative and mutually-exclusive perspectives of figure-ground pictures: the distinction between fiction and biography in the “Digression” disappears and reappears depending on how the analogy is viewed. From one standpoint, Wells argues that James’s art does not account for all of the novel’s “possibilities,” on analogy with Velasquezian portraiture not exhausting the possibilities of paint: here is an implied comparison of James and Velasquez in terms of technical achievement, relative to the medium as a whole. This preserves the argument for fictional veracity: the premise is that, because it is “necessarily fictitious through and through,” the novel transcends the constraints of a given set of actual circumstances. This is an interesting elaboration on the argument in “The Contemporary Novel,” where Wells contrasted fiction with other kinds of “objective” writing constrained by fact (871–72). Intriguingly—and, ultimately, tantalisingly, since the point is not developed any further—he begins to make the link he sees existing between freedom from constraints of subject matter and freedom from constraints of form more clear in the “Digression.”

Then there is the alternative perspective. Mid-sentence, Wells changes his mind and claims “the real analogy to Velazquez” is “biography, character drawn straight from life and not an invented story.” He uncouples the previous analogy between Velazquez and James, admitting that “James was very much against the idea” of biography (493).⁸⁶ In consequence he undermines the distinction between novels and biographical writing he drew by opposing “power of veracity” to “superficial fact” in 1911, and in the claim that “fiction [is] necessarily fictitious through and through” a moment earlier in the “Digression.” For he now urges that biography is the essential foundation for characterisation in the novel, claiming that it “is absolutely beyond the power of man to ‘create’ individuals absolutely” (493). Wells proceeds to explain (again, just a few lines ahead in his exposition):

If we do not write from models then we compile and fabricate. Every ‘living’ character in a novel

⁸⁵ See p. 50 for the earlier quotation.

⁸⁶ Wells refers to James’s objection to Vernon Lee’s (Violet Paget, 1856–1935) portrait of James in “Lady Tal” (1892). James wrote to his brother William, who was to meet Paget over dinner (20 Jan. 1893), not to let on that he was upset by the story; claiming not to have read the volume in question (*Vanitas*), he wrote “her books—fiction—are a tissue of personalities of the hideous roman-à-clef kind . . . brutal and bad” and objected to “the bad taste of her putting me *en scène* (and the whole treachery to private relations of the *procédé*)” (*Letters* 402).

is drawn, frankly or furtively, from life—is filched from biography whole or in scraps, a portrait or a patch-up, and its actions are a reflection upon moral conduct. At whatever number of ‘removes’ from facts we may be, we are still imputing motives to somebody. That is the conclusion I am coming to now, but I did not have it ready at that time. (493–94).⁸⁷

Where in 1911 Wells distinguished sharply between fact and fiction in exclusive terms, here he is more compromising, positing a continuum of degrees (“removes from facts” or attenuations) in place of strict alternatives. He continues to find “moral conduct” the point of novel writing, but now he tacitly defines his difference from James in terms of how frank or furtive is the treatment of biographical fact, a kind of evaluative formula balancing technical opacity against biographical transparency. The terms of the new definition may be less well-defined, but they come with evaluative, even moral, baggage of their own, if not a little psychological surmising by Wells, implying that James had unconsciously “filched from biography” for his books. If Wells and James were, as Wells remarks, “incompatibly right,” then the conflict lay less in method than in outcome: for both, Wells claims, their characters were “drawn . . . from life,” but for different ends (493). This is a long way from the promotion of the novel’s exemplary “power of veracity” as against biography, autobiography, history, in fact all other kinds of writing, in the 1911 lecture.⁸⁸ Wells did not just not have the argument “ready,” he proceeded in a different direction altogether.

This is another item to add to the list of defective argument strategies in the “Digression.” Wells’s repudiation of art in favour of journalism was staged at the cost of obscuring his substantive arguments in defence of a particular kind of art; his substitution of

⁸⁷ Legal issues might have been part of the reason Wells did not have this conclusion “ready” in 1911. Dickson suggests anxiety about legal action hampered Macmillan in finding an alternative publisher for *The New Machiavelli* (199). MacKenzie and MacKenzie quote a rejection letter from Heinemann citing the “dangerous (and perhaps libellous) atmosphere” of *Machiavelli* as grounds for passing on the book (268). Wells complains in *Experiment* about the unusual legal situation novelists find themselves in: “Our restraints upon the written discussion of living people are antiquated. Why should David Low say practically what he likes about actual people with his pencil, while I must declare every character in a novel to be fictitious?” (502). Low (1891–1963), a New Zealand-born political cartoonist famous for inventing “Colonel Blimp” and for his satires upon Continental leaders (notably Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin), illustrated Wells’s novel *The Autocracy of Mr. Parham* (1930). Wells’s complaint suggests that such declarations were often disingenuous; it is an unusual comment given the personal attack on James in *Boon*, a book in which not the characters but the purported author was obscured behind a veil of fiction (the full title ran, “Boon, The Mind of the Race, The Wild Asses of the Devil, and the Last Trump, Being a First Selection from the Literary Remains of George Boon, Appropriate to the Times, Prepared for Publication by Reginald Bliss, with an Ambiguous Introduction by H. G. Wells”).

⁸⁸ I point out here that the defence of “biographical and auto-biographical matter” in the “Digression” is consistent with the point of view of a number of Wells’s novels written in the first person. It contradicts the distinction he was at pains to make in 1911 between the veracity of fiction and the facts of biography, but can be read as a belated admission about his method and may even be responsible for the ambiguity I argue exists in the 1934 formulation. But such a reading overlooks the ink Wells spilt defending his novels against biographical and autobiographical readings, as I now discuss.

“frame” for “scope” encouraged misreading and blurred his attempt to differentiate between James’s practice and his own—such are the conclusions I drew from material covered in the sections above. What is to be made of his backtracking on the distinction between fiction and biography? I suggest it is a further flaw in the coherence of the “Digression.”

By claiming that all writing was, in the end, biographical (and going so far as to remark that he had found his own experiment “with biographical and auto-biographical matter . . . so much more real and interesting and satisfying that I doubt I shall ever again turn back towards *The Novel*”), Wells was acquiescing in a complaint repeatedly levelled at his work by its critics (*Experiment* 503).⁸⁹ They complained that Wells’s characters, where they were not modelled directly upon Wells himself, were mouthpieces or self-portraits. Before James had reproved Wells for the “accursed autobiographic form” of *Machiavelli*, Frank Harris had written that Wells was “utterly incapable of creating any character which is not a side of himself” (qtd. in Parrinder, *Critical Heritage* 26). Ada Galsworthy, wife of the novelist, thought the heroine in *Tono-Bungay* (1909) no more than a “peg to hang [Wells’s] theories on,” according to Galsworthy’s biographer (Mottram 140). Reviewing *The World of William Clissold* (1926) in his “Fiction” column for the *London Mercury* and arguing that Wells’s novels after *Kipps* (1905) were “almost exclusively constructed on the basis of a person very like [Wells] himself,” Edward Shanks drew the conclusion that *Clissold* was “not very interesting” on the grounds that Wells introduced “argument into fiction” and devised a protagonist who “is mostly a mouthpiece for the utterance of highly generalised opinions” (“Fiction [I]” 535; “Fiction [II]” 96–97). Rendering this line of attack down to its essence, the journalist and critic Desmond MacCarthy writes in his own autobiography that Wells’s fiction “is autobiography in disguise” (*Memories* 25).⁹⁰

⁸⁹ See note 65 above where I suggest that a fruitful study might be made by posing the question of how Wells’s autobiography compares to his fictional practice.

⁹⁰ Other examples of the derogation of Wells’s work on the basis of the mouthpiece critique include Shanks’ claim that *Clissold* was proof that Wells’s “power of creation” had “deserted” him (“Fiction [I]” 535); Somerset Maugham found Wells “an out-and-out pamphleteer” whose characters existed only “to express the ideas he was out to attack or defend” (216); Newell suggests that the novel form is surplus to Wells’s requirements since the ideas assigned to his characters “are his” and therefore “are autonomous and really need neither fictional context nor character,” though he also points out that since the positions represented by Wells’s characters are typically withdrawn, annulled or contradicted in the course of a given work, the mouthpiece critique will not withstand anything more than “careless reading” (108–10). (An example would be the contradiction by “hate and coarse think’n” of Remington’s motto “love and fine thinking” in *Machiavelli*, p. 496). Bergonzi attributes Wells’s decline as a creator of character to his journalistic ambitions, reporting that Wells followed up “several admirable works of true fiction” by producing, not studies of character and situations, but “monologues, where the vital and urgent issues of the day could be thoroughly ventilated and thrashed

Wells opposed such criticism vigorously at first. Responding to an allegation of autobiography by the *Glasgow Herald* in its advance notice of the *English Review*'s serialisation of *Tono-Bungay*, he ordered Hueffer to "trace the *Fool* who started this to his lair and cut his obscene throat" (Ludwig 28 note 1).⁹¹ He admitted in a letter to his publisher Frederick Macmillan (September 1910), marked "obviously private," that he had drawn "a libellous picture of the Webbs" in the proofs for *Machiavelli*, but distinguished between, on one hand, the "pretty recognizable picture of them in the second book" and, on the other, his using them "as characters in the subsequent style in that account," asserting a difference between direct portrait and fictional character that nonetheless needed to be made more clear in the finished work; in a later letter (1911, addressee unknown) he writes "*The New Machiavelli* is a work of fiction Remington is not H. G. Wells but just simply himself" (D. Smith, *Correspondence* 2:286, 311).⁹² Introducing the Atlantic Edition *Machiavelli*, Wells would dismiss the autobiographical complaint as "foolish talk" and the "fixed idea of the inferior type of

out," and brings his point home by quoting Wells's "rather be called a journalist" remark (*Situation* 195); Maugham has Wells admitting to being no more than a publicist for his ideas, a "high class" journalist, but one in need of robust sub-editing since he was "unnecessarily verbose" (216). On the autobiographical angle more generally, see Parrinder, who writes that *Machiavelli* and *Mr. Britling Sees It Through* (1916) present protagonists in the form of "a Wellsian self-projection who propounds analyses and formulations echoing those of Wells's non-fiction works" (*H. G. Wells* 98); Wells's son Gip would introduce a 1968 reprinting of *The Happy Turning* and *Mind at the End of Its Tether* (both 1945) by noting that it was "not by any means the first time that [Wells] had dressed up his ideas in a transparent disguise of fantasy" (*Last Books* 9); Lewis asserts there is "no doubt" that some of Wells's characters were portraits drawn from life, though she suggests no criterion for determining those that are or are not (78); Sherry finds in the title character of *Britling* a mouthpiece for Wells's pro-war apologetics (59–60). Wagar employs Wells as "primary source material" for intellectual history and quotes freely from Wells's fiction to illustrate his classic account of Wells's social theory (*World State* 1), whereas Fluett diagnoses Wells's shortcomings as a political theorist as the result of autobiographical technique (290). On the other hand, Hammond notes: "Few critics have acknowledged that in fact many of his narrators are more complex than a first reading would suggest, that in many cases he is at pains to distance himself from the narrator's views and attitude" (*H. G. Wells and the Modern Novel* 16). The criticism was not made of Wells alone. The Scottish critic William Archer (1856–1924), reviewing Shaw's play *Major Barbara* (1905) for *World* magazine on 5 December 1905, wrote that "Mr. Shaw's real daring lies in dispensing with character. There are no human beings in *Major Barbara*: there are only animated points of view" (151). Archer finds that Shaw's characters "have come out mere hollow mouthpieces" (152). Shaw anticipated the criticism in a mock "interview" about his play *Getting Married* printed in the London *Daily Telegraph* for 7 May 1908, under the title "Mr. Bernard Shaw on His New Play." He writes: "The characters will seem to the wretched critics to be simply a row of Shaws, all arguing with one another on totally uninteresting subjects".

⁹¹ Hueffer thought Wells was overreacting, responding with the query "does it really matter? *I* never have written a book that has not by someone or other been called autobiography" (Ludwig 28). D. Smith gives the date of the *Glasgow Herald* piece as 14 November 1908 (*Desperately* 540 note 39).

⁹² See Chapter 2, pp. 85–86 and note 47 for details on Wells's association with the Fabian Socialists Sidney and Beatrice Webb. Smith notes that Wells made "descriptive changes in the characters from the serial to that published in the novel" (2:286 note 1).

reviewer,” attributing it to “read[ing] between the lines instead of reading what a book has to say”; the remark suggests frustration at his novels being read not for their discussion of ideas but as thinly disguised intrigue about well-known personalities (*Works* 14:ix–x).⁹³ He responded to the criticism again in a prefatory “Note Before the Title Page” for *Clissold* the following year. Here he defends explicitly the use of recognisable features drawn from lived experience in the interest of “constructive necessity,” providing the novelist material for imaginative reconfiguration for the purpose of not a “portrait” or a “report,” not a passive portrayal of given circumstances, but a creative response to a situation exploited to give the imagination some leverage on experience. “All novelists use actual experiences in their work,” Wells protests; equally, “all novelists rearrange, sublimate, intensify”:

One turns over the sketch-book of one’s memories and uses what one needs. One takes a lifted eyebrow here and a mimosa in flower there. The imagination discovers a certain congruity between some actual situation and some constructive necessity, and works in as much of the situation as it needs. But it alters and rearranges without scruple. The eyebrow is not a portrait; the parallelism of a situation is not a report. Surely there is enough to read in this book without reading between the lines. (vi)

Here Wells rebuts the autobiographical critique by arguing that the working of the imagination over source material precludes producing a bland, verbatim description, a chronicle of actual events and people. It is a false opposition: not only would a factual “report” hardly be grounds for a libel action, but what autobiographical account, what portrait or report of a situation, indeed what *memory* is free of creative augmentation or diminution, whether conscious or not?⁹⁴ The preface provides advance notice of the laxness of his “conclusion” about “removes from facts” in the “Digression”: here Wells attacks biographical interpretation by arguing its shortcomings compared, not to the results of imaginative rearrangement, but to *the actual* biographical facts. Objecting to readings of *Mr. Britling Sees It Through* (1916) that equated the protagonist with Wells himself, he notes the irony that “every one who did not know Mr. Wells’ home in Essex very well, knew so surely [Britling’s house] was an exact account of Easton Glebe” (v).⁹⁵ Perhaps the true irony here is

⁹³ Bennett made a similar response to this line of criticism in a review of *Machiavelli* for the *New Age* the month before James’s letter to lamenting Wells’s use of the “accursed autobiographic form.” Bennett writes, “[t]he truth is that whenever a scene in a novel is *really* convincing, a certain type of critical and uncreative mind will infallibly mutter in accents of pain, ‘Autobiography!’” (*Books and Persons* 29).

⁹⁴ In the “Novel of Ideas” Wells would write, “the most unrighteous thing a reporter can do to a speaker or lecturer is to report him verbatim,” admitting the weakness of a factual report against the actuality of lived experience (220).

⁹⁵ An example of this approach can be found in Thurston Hopkins’s 1922 book on Wells. Hopkins mixes literary exegesis, travel writing, and biography uncritically in a chapter on “The Essex of H. G. Wells.”

that a better argument might have been found in defending autobiography in the interests of “constructive necessity” rather than worrying over the distinction between report and “parallelism,” or at the very least in rendering the whole question moot—and, in effect, this is what he does in the “Digression.” He suggests that the constructive necessity of the novel, the discussion and analysis of moral conduct, the attempt to get from an “actual situation” or set of socio-historical givens to its alteration and rearrangement through the searching critique of conduct, not only justifies drawing from life but cannot be achieved any other way.

A chapter on “The Future of the Novel” in *The Way the World Is Going* (1928) suggests Wells was moving toward this position before the thirties. Here he claims it was his concessions to “the old tradition” (he does not specify a literary-historical period or a school) of having, instead of reports of the actions of real people, characters “rather like them, but not exactly like them,” that had “set all the hunters of ‘originals’ agog to hunt identifications. . . . Heavens! the bore that has been to me! For years I could not write a book without having half the characters identified each with a dozen different ‘originals.’ And any figures left over at last, bless their hearts! were me” (290). Better, surely, to accept that biography is inevitable and move on to thinking about the ideas represented by the characters and situations instead of being hung up on their likeness to originals. But the title of Wells’s essay points to the problem in his theorising about the relationship of fiction and biography: he raises interesting questions but they are left hanging. Would he answer them in any future formulation of his approach to novel-writing—in the “Digression,” for example?

In fact this rhetorical strategy is exacerbated in the “Digression.” There, not only does Wells not address the profound difference between “fiction . . . necessarily fictitious” and “character . . . filched from biography,” he glosses over the intriguing issues of “‘removes’ from facts” (*Experiment* 493–94). What should one make of his discovery, in writing his own, that autobiography was more “real and interesting and satisfying” than “The Novel” (503)? Reading this as a reference to the Jamesian novel alone, the novel with a capital “N,” is to contradict Wells’s earlier premise, that James was deceiving not just his readers but himself in pretending not to write “from life.” Perhaps the novel is not biography, wholly or in part, after all. The earlier prefaces to *Clissold* and the Atlantic *Machiavelli* recognised a distinction: “it is a point worth considering,” he writes in the former, “in this period of successful personal memoirs that if the author had wanted to write a mental autobiography instead of a novel, there is no conceivable reason why he should not have done so”; and more pithily in

the latter, “why on earth if one wants to write an autobiography should one write a novel?” (*Clissold* ii–iii; *Works* 14:x). Did he still think there was a difference in 1934? The “Digression” certainly has him posing the question: “Who would read a novel if we were permitted to write biography—all out?” (503). These are good questions, but without clearly justified answers or the laying out of grounds upon which an answer might be found, they remain wholly rhetorical. Given that by raising the question, the difference between the novel and biography, Wells is responding to a long-standing critique of his imaginative writing, the evasive questioning strategy is unsatisfactory. The reader turning to the “Digression” for a definitive account of Wells’s conception of the novel finds only a provisional one, and recalls Wells’s caveat at the beginning of this section of his autobiography: “I find before me a considerable accumulation of material . . . It refuses to be simplified” (487). By the end of the “Digression” he is back to making claims that would not have been out of place in “The Contemporary Novel”—that what counts for him as work worth pursuing is “those copious intimate character studies, character in relation to changing values and conditions”—but he now calls such work “[g]ood biography” (504). He makes the same substantive claim and remains interested in writing that is constructive in its approach to character in context, but he evades the entire question of genre by taxonomic fiat.⁹⁶

Summing up, I note that the point Wells reaches in the “Digression,” stressing a kind of methodological continuity or even identity between what conventionally are considered separate literary genres—the novel or biography, “invented story” or writing “straight from life”—undermines his defence in “The Contemporary Novel” of the genre’s unique “power of veracity.” But the account of 1934 does not present a compelling reason for preferring it to the 1911 formulation. For one thing, the argument *as argument* is not compelling. The “conclusion I am coming to now,” Wells writes, is that he had all along been wrong about the distinction between the novel and biography (494). But no sooner is the point made than he throws the question open again with his reference to “removes.” The point is significant, raising questions about how “removed” from fact Wells considered biography or, indeed, any other kind of non-fiction to be. Biography, as life *writing* rather than the raw data or

⁹⁶ This is a problem with repercussions for more than Wells’s work alone. For example, Bergonzi, in the part of his book on *The Situation of the Novel* discussing a tendency to autobiography in the twentieth-century novel and its challenge to the “fictional illusion,” also pulls up short of precise definitions of genre, preferring an overall differentiating strategy, noting “the distinction between fiction and other kinds of writing” (197, 210).

subjective experience of life itself, is already a study of character at some degree of “remove,” so it must be noted that drawing “from life” and filching “from biography” are not the equivalents Wells appears to think they are (493–94). The question of the difference between life and *any* kind of writing raises the fundamental question of the imposition of form that Wells had tried to make a subordinate issue, not just in the “Digression” but earlier in “The Contemporary Novel,” by defining aesthetic problems in social terms. Blurring the distinctions between what is unique to the novel on one hand and other forms of writing on the other, the “Digression” is compatible with the watershed thesis on Wells’s artistic development: he repudiates the distinctions that formed the basis for his conception of the novel and, in the process, renounces the very idea that he ever meant to take art seriously.

But the record suggests otherwise. In the next chapter, I examine how Wells’s association with the London intellectual elite after the turn of the century led him to abandon a sceptical attitude, articulated most stridently in *Anticipations*, about the possibility of social efficacy in fiction, and to formulate a position that anticipates his defence, in “The Contemporary Novel,” of the novel conceived as an art form in terms of social objectives. I relate the key findings of the present chapter—that “The Contemporary Novel” represents his mature conception of the novel based on a definition of what is unique to fiction in terms of the novel’s “power of veracity,” its unique ability to interrogate the effects of social forces on individuals—to claims Wells makes in the context of contemporary sociological and philosophical debates: in particular, I examine Wells’s lecture on “The Scepticism of the Instrument,” read before a group of Oxford philosophers at the end of 1903, and show how it prepared the way for Wells’s argument, in an article on “The So-Called Science of Sociology” (1905), for a central role for fiction in sociological analysis. Preparatory reading Wells undertook for the lecture provoked him to reassess the importance of individual perspective in all matters pertaining to social experience and general thought; it issued in Wells’s argument that literature, like politics, philosophy, and morals, is a form of “self-expression” concerned with the relationship between individual minds and socio-moral givens and ideals. This cognitive reassessment of literature prompted Wells to drop the sceptical attitude of *Anticipations*, and led to his defence of the novel as a form of writing with privileged access to the textures of social life in “The Contemporary Novel.”

2

A Romancer among Gradgrinds: Wells's Scepticism and Social-Aesthetic Synthesis, 1901 to 1905

Nine essays undersigned "H. G. Wells" appeared in the *Fortnightly Review* with the general title *Anticipations: An Experiment in Prophecy* between April and December 1901.¹ Wells arranged with the London publishing house Chapman & Hall to print the essays in book form with minor revisions at the end of the year. The book was popular, capitalising on curiosity about what lay ahead in the new century; it sold "as well as a novel" and went through four editions within a year (*Experiment* 646).² Wells had already made a name for himself as an author of fiction with the publication of seven romances, two novels, and three volumes of short stories between 1895 and 1901.³ But *Anticipations* was a distinctive change of tack; here, in a book he would later describe as "the keystone to the main arch of my work," Wells called into question the value of imaginative literature in the field of sociological speculation (*Experiment* 643).

¹ The *Fortnightly's* editor, W. L. Courtney, commissioned Wells to write them (MacKenzie and MacKenzie, *Time Traveller* 161). Wells had been published in the *Fortnightly* four times in the preceding ten years, with articles on "The Rediscovery of the Unique" (1891), "Human Evolution, an Artificial Process" (1896), "Morals and Civilisation" (1897), and "The Cyclist Soldier" (1900). I discuss the significance of "Rediscovery," the basic premise of which Wells revived in a 1903 paper on "Scepticism of the Instrument," pp. 84–85, 101–03 below. I examine the articles on "Human Evolution" and "Morals and Civilisation" in the context of Wells's fiction reviewing for the *Saturday Review* in Chapter 3, arguing that they help explain why he prefers the social novel over other forms: see pp. 137–48 below. The article of 1900 was a satirical examination of contemporary military strategy. My references to *Anticipations* throughout are to the Chapman & Hall book publication of 1902. Wells changed the title for book publication to *Anticipations of the Reaction of Mechanical and Scientific Progress upon Human Life and Thought*.

² The sales figures are all the more impressive given the limited market for essays published in book form. Writing in 1903, Bennett claimed there was "almost no market whatever for essays" and that only "surpassingly good" examples would be attractive to a publisher: "but the possibility of the author receiving any appreciable sum thereby is remote to the last degree" (*How to Become an Author* 167).

³ Adopting Wells's own criteria for generic distinctions, the romances were *The Time Machine* and *The Wonderful Visit* (both 1895), *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896), *The Invisible Man* (1897), *The War of the Worlds* (1898), *When the Sleeper Awakes* (1899) and *The First Men in the Moon* (1901); the novels were *The Wheels of Chance* (1896) and *Love and Mr. Lewisham* (1900); the volumes of short stories were *The Stolen Bacillus and Other Incidents* (1895), *The Plattner Story and Others* (1897), and *Tales of Space and Time* (1899). *The First Men in the Moon*, originally serialised in the *Strand Magazine* (November 1900 to August 1901), appeared in book form before the book publication of *Anticipations*. The title page for *The First Men* refers to Wells as "[a]uthor of 'Anticipations'," probably a reference to the *Fortnightly* serialisation (n.p.). Reviews for both works appeared in November and December 1901: see Scheick and Cox 17–19.

The new book was to be a “serious forecast,” one defined by its provisional character, its “diffidence”—so Wells asserts on the opening page. He thinks forecasts of the future in the form of fictional works have proved themselves inadequately sincere and too readily provoked by “satirical opportunity” (*Anticipations* 1). Writing “with the intimacy of one who has tried,” he confesses that “fiction can never be satisfactory” in social and political prediction for various reasons: it is “concrete and definite,” permits “no open alternatives”; it aims at “illusion” which “prevents a proper amplitude of demonstration”; its “form carries with it something of a disavowal,” is either “polemical, cautionary, or idealistic” and, ultimately, “a mere footnote and commentary to our present discontents” (2 note). Narrative is “a nuisance” where the “speculative inductions” of serious prophecy accumulate, and should be abandoned “in favour of a texture of frank inquiries and arranged considerations”; “modern prophecy should be, one submits, a branch of speculation, and should follow with all decorum the scientific method” (2).⁴ The first essay, on “Locomotion in the Twentieth Century,” barely commences before Wells has denied the methods of fiction—“narrative” and “illusion” at least—motive force in sociological speculation.⁵

⁴ Examples include Benjamin Kidd’s *Social Evolution* (1894). For Wells’s response to Kidd, see Chapter 3, p. 139 below. Wells cites no specific examples of prophecy gone astray in fiction, referring only to generic “Battles of Dorking” or “Stories of the Year 2000,” though he might have had in mind George Chesney’s *The Battle of Dorking* (1871) or F. N. Maude’s *The New Battle of Dorking* (1900), and Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward: 2000–1887* (1888), a novel that resembles Wells’s *When the Sleeper Wakes* in some important essentials: Bellamy’s protagonist is hypnotised and wakes in the year 2000 to a world transformed by socialism. Bellamy’s book was a best-seller, though Batchelor describes it as “a naive and badly written work” (7); it spawned many political adherents and a number of literary responses and parodies; William Morris responded with *News From Nowhere* (1891). Patai (ed.) has a good collection of essays on Bellamy. See Wagar, “Dreams of Reason” for a comparison of Bellamy’s book and Wells’s Utopian writings; Wagar suggests that the “phenomenal popularity” of *Looking Backward* in England “no doubt played a part in Wells’s decision to explore the future in a long series of utopias, scientific romances, and sociological tracts, of which the first major installment was *The Time Machine*” and “directly inspired” *When the Sleeper Wakes*, though Wagar does not discuss Wells’s remarks in *Anticipations* (113). It is also possible Wells is being self-critical; his statement that “[h]itherto . . . the provocation of the satirical opportunity has been too much for the writer” (my emphasis) could be read as a reference to his own romances and novels. Batchelor remarks resemblances between Chesney’s novel and *War of the Worlds* (24).

⁵ This was not the first time fiction had been rejected as unfit for social thought. In his *Fragment on Government* (1776) Jeremy Bentham urged “the season of *Fiction* is now over.” Bentham rejected Rousseau’s notion of an original social contract, pointing out it was impossible to open a history book to the moment at which such a contract was drawn up. This did not matter, except as evidence that such a fiction was irrelevant to a theory of society: “The indestructible prerogatives of mankind have no need to be supported upon the sandy foundation of a fiction. . . . To prove fiction . . . there is need of fiction; but it is the characteristic of truth to need no proof but truth” (154–55). Coincidentally, Bentham, like Wells, conducted the majority of his anti-fiction argument in a long footnote. Wells’s argument bears some resemblance to Plato’s banishment of poets in the *Republic*: like Wells, who finds fiction deceptive, too polemical and inadequately “frank,” Plato objected to the imitative character of poetry, finding it “thrice removed from the truth” in his translator, Jowett’s phrase, and too likely to

The rejection in *Anticipations* of fiction as a means of social analysis is a pole apart from Wells's defence of the novel, in his 1911 talk on "The Contemporary Novel," as an examination of characters' "proceedings" with a "power of veracity" of its own, a "study of the association and inter-reaction of individualised human beings" and "the only medium through which we can discuss the great majority of the problems" of "our contemporary social development" ("Contemporary Novel" 863, 869, 872).⁶ But it is no momentary lapse: in a talk entitled "The Discovery of the Future," which Wells delivered to an audience at the Royal Institution, he can be found repeating the argument that literature is poor at comprehending the future, asserting it "is for the most part history or history at one remove," preoccupied with the past while "to-morrow is the eventful thing" ("Discovery" 327).⁷ However, such repudiation of fiction's ability to interrogate the future soon gave way to a marked reversal in attitude. In *Mankind in the Making*, a further series of *Fortnightly* essays published between September 1902 and September 1903, which Wells conceived as taking up where the previous speculative outing left off, he defended a social role for the novel on the grounds that novels were "experiments" in ways of thinking about the specific circumstances affecting individual lives, and endorsed the funding of endowments to assist authors in their work (*Mankind* 302, 375).⁸ A few months later, in a paper presented to the Oxford Philosophical Society, he argued that literature, along with philosophy, morals, politics, is a form of "self-expression," a formulation leading directly to his classic defence of the novel as an essential underpinning to sociological methods in "The So-Called Science of

"inflame the passions": see Jowett iv; Battin 163. Wells "found Plato's *Republic*" while living at Uppark in Sussex, where his mother was housekeeper in the first years of the 1880s; later he described it as "a very releasing book indeed for my mind. . . . Here was the amazing and heartening suggestion that the whole fabric of law, custom and worship, which seemed so invincingly established, might be cast into the melting pot and made anew" (*Experiment* 138). In an 1884 essay on "The Art of Fiction," the historian and novelist Walter Besant (1836–1901) noted a disinclination to take novelists seriously: "The general—the Philistine—view of the Profession [of novelists] is, first of all, that it is not one which a scholar and a man of serious views should take up: the telling of stories is inconsistent with a well-balanced mind; to be a teller of stories disqualifies one from a hearing on important subjects" (12). Also: "When Thackeray ventured to contest the city of Oxford, we know what happened. He thought his failure was because the people of Oxford had never even heard of him; I think otherwise. I think it was because it was whispered from house to house, and was carried from shop to shop, and was mentioned in the vestry, that this fellow from London, who asked for their votes, was nothing but a common novelist" (13–14).

⁶ See Chapter 1, pp. 19–21 for discussion.

⁷ I discuss the talk in detail, pp. 74–81 below.

⁸ See pp. 82–85 below for my discussion of *Mankind*. I discuss the other text cited in this paragraph, Wells's address to the Oxford Philosophical Society entitled "Scepticism of the Instrument," pp. 95–106 below.

Sociology,” where he would claim that sociology must be “knowledge rendered through personality, that is to say, in the highest sense of the term, literature,” and, with his own most recent production, *A Modern Utopia*, in mind, “that the creation of Utopias—and their exhaustive criticism—is the proper and distinctive method of sociology” (“Scepticism” 392; “So-Called” 32, 34).⁹ This sounds more like the 1911 talk, where Wells argues that the great novels of the past are “saturated in the personality of the author” and that contemporary novels are to contribute to the “enormous criticism” of “rule and conduct” that characterises modern society and defines the scope of the novel (865, 868). Wells’s assertion of a cognitive, social role for the novel did not arise fully-formed in 1911; it was the product of a process of development. Some attempt must be made at understanding how Wells arrived at this position, and under what circumstances.¹⁰ In two years, Wells proceeded through a gamut of methodological possibilities for sociology, from an endorsement of induction on the scientific model, to novels conceived as experiments, to literature as the model for the synthesis of objective and subjective approaches to understanding society—from a denial of constructive, “serious” social implications in fiction to an endorsement of fiction as the essential methodological foundation for professional sociological speculation.¹¹ The objective in this chapter is to chart and suggest a tentative explanation for these developments.

As I discuss in Chapter 3, the conception of the novel Wells develops during his tenure as fiction reviewer for the *Saturday Review* presents a defence of the novel on the grounds of social objectives and effects that is, in all important respects, identical to Wells’s 1911 formulation.

⁹ Page references for “The So-Called Science of Sociology” are to the original 1905 *Independent* printing, unless stated otherwise.

¹⁰ Hynes, remarking on Wells’s “sudden and extreme” success as a social thinker, finds: “The sales of Wells’ ‘sociological’ books might be explained away as representing a semi-educated taste, but this does not explain the fact that in November 1903—the year of *Mankind in the Making*—Wells was invited to read a paper to the Oxford Philosophical Society, or that the paper was subsequently published in *Mind*, or that another paper, *The Discovery of the Future*, was read to the Royal Institution and published in the Smithsonian Report for 1902” (103–04). This chapter is an attempt to provide an account of the reception of Wells’s sociological writing, the speaking invitations extended to him because of it, but also the development of his conception of the relation of imaginative literature to sociological thought.

¹¹ Actually, a preface Wells wrote for an English translation of Gabriel Tarde’s *Underground Man* (1905; orig. *Fragment d’histoire future*, 1904) contains the profoundest contradiction of the rejection of fiction, in *Anticipations*, for being too ironic or “satirical.” Here Wells claimed that “fantastic and ‘ironical’ fiction” like Tarde’s “is the only [sic] medium to express the vague, ill-formed, new ideas with which we are all labouring. . . . [I]t seems to be the only method at present available by which we may talk about our race’s material Destiny at all” (“Preface” 6). Tarde (1843–1904) was a French sociologist. The translated work, advertised by its publisher as “one of those UTOPIAS exemplified in Mr. Wells’s Romances,” was published about six months after “The So-Called Science of Sociology” appeared in the *Independent*. See, for instance, an advertisement in the *Academy* for 7 Oct. 1905, p. 1018.

The repudiative gestures, in *Anticipations* and “The Discovery of the Future,” effectively book-ended by Wells’s reviewing practice in the mid-1890s and the development, which I show in this chapter, from “Scepticism of the Instrument” and “The So-Called Science of Sociology” to the mature conception articulated in the 1911 talk on “The Contemporary Novel,” respectively, present something of a puzzle. The question is, what prompted Wells to change his mind about the possibility of social engagement in fiction?¹²

My answer to this question is that as Wells became increasingly involved in the London intellectual scene in the wake of the publication of *Anticipations*, his “steady invasion of the world of influential and authoritative people,” as he calls it in his autobiography, his attitude toward social efficacy in the novel changed (*Experiment* 636). Discussing the key works—*Anticipations*, “The Discovery of the Future,” *Mankind in the Making*, and “Scepticism of the Instrument”—and arguing that it was not Wells’s own literary cohort who offered the most pertinent and lucid objections to the derogation of the novelist’s craft in *Anticipations* but the sociologists and political economists and philosophers its publication put him in contact with, I explore the transformation in attitude from his dismissal of fiction as a form of social analysis in *Anticipations* to his defence of imaginative literature as a form of “self-expression” with cognitive and social consequences. The conclusion I draw is that Wells’s bid for intellectual prestige, his attempt at a “serious forecast” of the future in *Anticipations*, led him to exaggerate the methodological differences between fiction and sociology, partly because the discipline of sociology in England, itself still in a process of gradual coalescence, was preoccupied with methodological debate.¹³ The result was an assertion of the importance of allegedly scientific, inductive generalisations at the expense of attention to individual difference and the importance of “personality” in determining the cognitive relation between individuals and social experience, which meant Wells was contradicting his own earlier

¹² To an attendant question—why does Wells reject fiction as a form of social analysis in *Anticipations* if the conception of the novel he develops in his reviewing for the *Saturday* is based upon a defence on grounds of social efficacy?—I suggest an answer in Chapter 3, pp. 137–48 below, arguing that while the defence on social grounds characterises Wells’s reviewing, by the time his tenure at the *Saturday* ended he had arrived at a sceptical notion of the social efficacy of fiction; the defence of the novel in terms of social objectives easily shifted to a critique of the novel in terms of its failure to execute them. To this extent, Bergonzi’s finding that Wells’s earliest fictional efforts, the scientific romances and short stories of 1895 to 1901, express an “intellectual scepticism” could be extended to characterise the outcome of Wells’s exploration of means and ends in the novel in his reviewing practice, too (*Early H. G. Wells* 22).

¹³ See note 48 below.

position, represented in his reviewing for the *Saturday* and in an 1891 essay entitled “The Rediscovery of the Unique,” emphasising the significance of the concept of individuality for all fields of human knowledge.¹⁴ But Wells’s encounter with ideas sympathetic with his earlier position, if not always a sympathetic audience, led him to revive the emphasis on personality present in the earlier work; the earlier formulation, not the derogative attitude espoused in *Anticipations*, would form the basis of his mature conception of the novel.¹⁵ Intriguingly, it was neither Wells’s literary cohort, nor the group of sociologists and political economists he became acquainted with after *Anticipations*, who successfully prompted Wells to revive his earlier position and develop a defence of imaginative literature under a sociological conception. They raised pertinent objections to his procedure in *Anticipations*, but the decisive contribution originated with a book of technical essays written by a small group of Oxford philosophers.¹⁶ In short, while there are twists and turns in the documents I examine in this chapter, it remains possible to demonstrate a general continuity in Wells’s ideals for the novel and his attempt to integrate aesthetic and social notions.

A race without art

When Chapman & Hall advertised a fifth edition of *Anticipations* in 1902, quoting eight reviews from periodicals like the *Saturday Review* and *Academy*, greatest prominence was given to an excerpt from the *Spectator* for 18 January 1902, reading: “In Mr. Wells we have not merely an imaginative writer of truly original power, but a thinker of very considerable calibre” (n.p.).¹⁷ The reviewer’s “not merely” reiterates, if only for rhetorical effect, the fiction–social prophecy hierarchy of Wells’s methodologizing. This was no isolated case of appearing to attribute greater prestige to intellectual over novelistic productions. The journalist W. T. Stead greeted the serial *Fortnightly* instalments favourably in his *Review of Reviews* and found the change in approach to elevate Wells’s literary standing. “Until the

¹⁴ For a brief summary of “Rediscovery,” see pp. 84–85, 101–03 below. For my discussion of the relation between the concept of personality and the conception of the novel Wells developed in his book reviewing for the *Saturday*, see Chapter 3, esp. pp. 115–16.

¹⁵ Wells writes in his autobiography that he “revived” the argument from “Rediscovery” in his Oxford lecture of “Scepticism of the Instrument” (*Experiment* 224). Actually this revival commenced in tacit terms with Wells’s assertion of the “claim of . . . individualities over any general rules” in *Mankind in the Making* (p. 300), but “Scepticism” captures the moment Wells articulates an explicit preference for the specific circumstances of individuals over the inductive generalisations he had endorsed as forms of social analysis in *Anticipations* and “The Discovery of the Future.” See pp. 101–04 below.

¹⁶ See the section headed “Schiller & Co.,” p. 95 below.

¹⁷ The advertisement appears in the front-papers of the Unwin pamphlet publication of Wells’s Royal Institution lecture. See Wells, *The Discovery of the Future* (London: Unwin, 1902), n.p.

publication of these articles he was regarded as little more than an ingenious romancer,” Stead writes, in a phrase reminiscent of the *Spectator*’s “merely an imaginative writer”: “But these papers . . . have placed him on a distinctly higher pedestal” (“Coming of the New Republic” 512). It was only when reviewing the book publication that Stead specified the stuff this pedestal was made of. Here Stead writes that he first realised Wells was a genius while reading *The Time Machine* in instalments in W. E. Henley’s *New Review* in 1895. (Stead was in the van of positive critical response to Wells’s first major foray into imaginative literature.)¹⁸ But: “I had no idea, until I read ‘Anticipations’ month by month as they came out in the *Fortnightly*, that he was capable of taking so comprehensive a sweep and of formulating upon so many and such varied data a philosophical conception of the probable destiny of the human race” (“Books of the Month” 640). Wells is notable for his “faculty of constructive imagination,” Stead continues, before duplicating Wells’s own formal hierarchy, finding imaginative literature characteristically less inclusive, less serious, less compelling in its anticipatory speculations, even though it was in a novel about the future that Stead first took the measure of Wells’s genius: the “previous books,” though “but fiction,” revealed an imaginative vision that surpassed expectation based on genre (640). Wells had yet to find the true calling for his genius in 1895, Stead writes, and proved himself merely a brilliant writer of romances; now, says Stead, he is philosopher, prophet, literary *cause célèbre*.¹⁹

There were also critiques of Wells’s methodological distinctions. A review in the *Athenaeum* challenged the “new method” of dealing with “logic” and “facts,” preferring the “guise of fiction” in Wells’s previous books, because “what Mr. Wells gains in controversial power he loses in clearness and explicitness by this new method, and his general view of the future organization of society is not nearly so easy to grasp from these essays as it was from some of his earlier books” (“Anticipations” 766). Furthermore, like French political thinkers, Wells has written “the aberrations of individuals” out of his account (767). An American reviewer for the Boston *Literary World* came close to contradicting Wells’s attempt to distinguish between prophecy and fiction in terms of results. Notwithstanding the essays “are not put in the form of fiction,” the new work is as narrow and arbitrary as a novel and “no

¹⁸ See Baylen 53–56 for a detailed discussion of the Wells–Stead relationship between 1895 and 1911 and of Stead’s reviews of *Time Machine* in the *Review of Reviews*.

¹⁹ In an intriguing counterpoint to Wells’s rejoinder to Bennett that the latter had failed to consider the “culminating effect” of the book (see p. 73 below), Stead noted the solid “accumulation of facts,” though he found Wells’s reasoning “open to question” (“Books of the Month” 640).

more reliable than the countless novels of the future unhappily so familiar in recent years and so profitless. . . . The book is a travesty of possibilities” (“A Book of Anticipations” 118). Similarly remarking “a revival in that most serious of all human historical functions, the art of prophecy” in novels and non-fiction alike, G. K. Chesterton’s review in the *Pall Mall Magazine* for 26 January 1902 raises the most pertinent objection to *Anticipations*.²⁰ Finding the book “dextrous and suggestive” and “most worthy of being seriously read, and seriously disagreed with,” Chesterton seriously disagreed with the kind of future Wells endorsed, objecting in particular to Wells’s utilitarian preoccupations. The men and women populating Wells’s New Republic, Wells’s term for the enlightened, efficient world state of the future, “may at any moment be made to look as black and mean as a mob of ants by the appearance of a martyr or an artist,” they are “a race . . . without gaiety, without art, without faith” and Wells would have done better, in Chesterton’s view, to think more on “what they will be excited about” than the kinds of institutions they will run (“Books to Read” 133–34).²¹

The idea that Wells conceived of a future with scant accommodation for art is not far-fetched. *Anticipations* is somewhat inconsistent on the question of whether or not literature has anything to offer future society, but the opposition between the illusion of fiction and hard-nosed inductive prophecy in the opening passages of the book is certainly of deeper than methodological and rhetorical significance. Later in *Anticipations* Wells can be found arguing that fiction (though he tends to use the vaguer generic “literature”) does have social value; he writes that the “romance of *mésalliance*” with which the “whole mass of modern fiction written by women for women . . . is saturated” raises new possibilities of social mobility for women (119); that “contemporary literature,” distinct from classical Greek and Latin, “is the breath

²⁰ Wells, too, attests to the “abundance” of attempts at prophecy in fiction: “I learn from Mr. Peddie, the bibliographer, over one hundred pamphlets and books of that description” (*Anticipations* 2 note).

²¹ Other responses from Wells’s immediate cohort include a letter from Conrad who was intrigued by *Anticipations*, writing to Wells that the book augured “the opening of a campaign,” while complaining that Wells’s position was “unsound” because Wells addressed “a sort of select circle . . . leaving the rest of the world outside the pale,” and thereby risked “a fatal limiting of influence” (Jean-Aubry 1:328). (MacKenzie and MacKenzie, *Time Traveller* 455 note 7 find that the editor of Conrad’s correspondence mistakenly attributes Conrad’s undated letter to 1904, finding it a response not to *Anticipations* but *Mankind in the Making*, but they present no evidence for their revision.) Henry James later estimated the cumulative achievement of what he called Wells’s “Social Imaginations,” the trio of works comprising *Anticipations*, *Mankind in the Making*, and *A Modern Utopia*, finding it notable for a combination of intellectual vigour and social impudence: “Cheeky, cheeky, cheeky is *any* young man at Sandgate’s offered Plan for the life of Man” (*Letters* 4:378). See D. Smith, *Desperately* 92 and 94 for additional background on the contemporary response to *Anticipations*. Smith has Carveth Reid, Professor of Philosophy of Mind and Logic at University College London, sending a copy to William James (514 note 9, citing a letter to Reid 30 May 1902). See pp. 95–100 below for more on the response to Wells by James and the circle of British Pragmatists at Oxford.

of civilized life, and those who sincerely think and write the salt of the social body” (270); that publishing is a “public concern” served poorly by private enterprise, that the writer will be liberated from market pressures in the New Republic, and that the haphazard conduits of contemporary book distribution will be replaced by trusts and associations (270–72); he even says he wishes his local bookshop had “all that I have not read of the work of Mr. Frank Stockton” (272 note).²² The remarks suggest Wells maintained some faith in the salutary effects of literature, but on balance the tendency to rebut these effects wins out. He finds French bookshops superior to English counterparts as repositories of “contemporary intellectual life” because English stores are crammed with “horribly printed novels . . . brand new fiction or illustrated travel . . . or gilded versions of the classics of past times” while it is quite likely that one will encounter a work (a non-fictional work, naturally) by William James when strolling along the Avenue de l’Opera in Paris (238–39).²³ He imagines the typical hard-working, New-Republican spousal couple finding “their secondary interests . . . in a not too imaginative prose literature, in travel and journeys”—real, not illustrated—“and in the less sensuous aspects of music” (106). And he speculates on the transformation of the omnipresent local newspaper into a “world paper” (163 note). On this there is some amusing utilitarian prognostication—a machine endows his world paper with “a form that will not inevitably get into the butter, or lead to bitterness in a railway carriage”—but the fundamental editorial changes Wells envisages give a sense of his literary-evaluative estimates (163 note). His newspaper “will probably not contain fiction at all, and poetry only rarely, because no one but a partial imbecile wants these things in punctual daily doses” (163 note). Instead, “in addition to its concentrated and absolutely trustworthy daily news,” there will appear “full and luminous accounts of new inventions, new theories, and new departures of all sorts (usually illustrated), witty and penetrating comments upon public affairs, criticisms of

²² Stockton (1834–1902) was an American novelist and short story writer. He wrote *The Great War Syndicate* (1889) in which scientists attempt (in MacLeod’s words) “to avert war by taking over from the vexatious impulses of politicians” (“Bankruptcy” 6). The premise would probably have appealed to Wells, though there is no evidence he knew the book apart from the fleeting reference to Stockton in *Anticipations*. Writing in the *Saturday*, Wells was less salutary towards Stockton: see Chapter 3, note 20 below.

²³ Although Wells nowhere explicitly defines what he takes “literature” to be or to mean, the three clauses I quote here constrain the options significantly. His refusal to entertain the definitional problem is perhaps justified by the fact that *Anticipations* offers a theory of society, not a theory of literature. As Parrinder and Philmus point out in relation to *Mankind in the Making*, Wells frequently employs the term “literature” to refer to something like “thought” or ideas (12).

all sorts of things, representations of newly produced works of art, and an ample amount of ably written controversy upon everything under the sun” (163 note). The remarks imply an aesthetic hierarchy, albeit one pertaining solely to editorial decisions in daily newspaper production: there is to be no restraint on the pictorial arts or their “representations” at least, or illustrations (circumventing utter austerity); poetry will only be used to make up column inches on slow news days; fiction “probably” is banished and the satirical opportunities of sheer fictional abandon avoided outright. Beyond such constraints there is little in the way of proscribed subject matter: journalists are set to work on “all sorts of things . . . everything under the sun,” although it is correspondence, not lead articles, that will command the greatest remuneration (163 note). In sum, Wells’s New Republicans enjoying prose works that are “not too imaginary” is the characteristic note. It is the *effects* of art that appear to trouble Wells the most: his critique proceeds from a hidden premise that art is varied and potent in effect and must be attenuated. Music that is not too sensuous, prose not too imaginative are acceptable; daily inoculations of fiction and poetry are a threat to New Republican efficiency. There is no injunction against the fruits of imagination absolutely, but ringing clear is a sceptical note regarding their relationship to future social forms.

Given Wells’s scepticism on the value of art in the future, it is perplexing that his literary cohort had little to say on the matter.²⁴ Chesterton’s is the most direct statement toward a

²⁴ Reviewers of Wells’s later productions were hardly so forgiving. For example, readers of his *Outline of History* (1920) were quick to allege aesthetic lapses. One complained in the *New Statesman* that by ignoring music Wells could not “claim to tell the whole history of mankind” (“History from an Aeroplane” 625). The English critic and literary historian George Sampson lamented the omission of philosophers, artists, composers, and poets, worrying Wells was pandering to the contemporary “belief in nothing but material things” and overlooking art’s promotion of “a mode of sane and wholesome life” (“Cursor Mundi” 13). The classicist A. W. Gomme, in a forty-five-page pamphlet attacking Wells’s accounts of ancient Greece and Rome, claimed Wells had made “confident statements at random” and misled his readers, ignored Greek lyric poetry, and even where he discussed Homer, provided “no word of the poetic merit of the poems, nothing of Homer’s place in literature, of the light he throws on Greek thought, of the kind of poetry he wrote” (*Mr. Wells as Historian* 3–4, 15). E. M. Forster attempted to defend Wells against these charges of “aesthetic blindness,” as he termed them, finding “the lucidity of the plan, the vitality of the execution, and the ceaseless pouncing intelligence of H. G. W.” to outweigh the criticism (“Mr. Wells’s ‘Outline’” 690–91). But the defence admits tacitly what Wells claims explicitly in his own response, that art and literature are not necessarily prime movers in historical development. Wells responded to such critics by pointing out that it was never his intention to treat every area of specialised historical and humanistic knowledge in a manner satisfying the academic specialist. Homer, Shakespeare, Giotto represent “outbreaks of beauty” that “may be very important to the human soul and so forth” but “were considerations beyond the intention of the *Outline*,” which was to provide only the “mental framework” upon which more specialised knowledge “may be hung” (“History for Everybody” 909). But he added eighteen new sections dealing specifically with art and literature to a revamped edition published in 1925, noting in the preface the “frequently repeated” complaints (*Outline* [1925] 6). See Skelton for a detailed discussion of the publishing history

critique of Wells's utilitarian attitude toward art in *Anticipations*, and it is not pointed. Bennett restricted himself largely to stylistic issues, jokingly calling the project "*Uncle's-dissipations*," probably in reference to Wells's 1895 volume of *Select Conversations with an Uncle*, and noted that "*occasionally* there appeared to be a certain turgidity, or confusedness, which struck one as though it might have been avoided either by greater length of explanation, or severe rewriting" (Wilson 66). As if to emphasise the importance of comprehending the gradual accumulation of data upon which inductive generalisations about future configurations can be made, Wells replied that his friend's "detached reading" gave him "no inkling of the massive culminating effect of the book as a whole," an odd defence of essays that were obviously destined for serial publication on their way to becoming a book, but he agreed with Bennett's stylistic notes, conceding "the thing has been a hell of a handful to manage" (67–68). Bennett would be less reserved about Wells's next attempt to foretell future forms of social organization, finding the writing in *Mankind in the Making*, like *Anticipations*, "very wonderful, and very uneven" (99). He found the new book to suffer from the stylistic shortcomings of the previous one, "only more so. You have just got to face the fact that I was continually, except in the best passages, irritated by the bad technique of the writing," referring to "sundry examples of bad grammar, scores of bad punctuation, hundreds of striking inelegance, and not a few of obscurity that might easily have been avoided" (101). Bennett had by this time published a book on *How to Become an Author* (1903) that contained stylistic advice, although he admitted that "historians, theologians, men of science, and philosophers"—Wells was attempting to cover most of these bases in his writing—would find little help between its covers (157). It could be that Bennett felt intimidated intellectually by Wells and withdrew from more profound criticism, especially with *Anticipations*, where he raised no objection to the treatment of imaginative literature. He confessed he was "absolutely overwhelmed by the breadth and sheer intellectual vigour" of the articles, "not to mention the imaginative power"—"I have never seen so good an illustration of the scientific use of imagination"—and that the essays "really have made me a little afraid of you" (Wilson 56, 66). It would take Wells's prescriptions in *Mankind* for ways in which "the literary sense of the average person" might be improved by pragmatic means (Wells had contended that "[a] few carefully chosen pages of contemporary rubbish, read with a running comment, a few of the *Outline*).

carefully chosen pages of what is, comparatively, not rubbish, a little lucid discussion of effects and probabilities, would do more to quicken the literary sense of the average person than all the sham enthusiasm about Marlowe and Spenser that was ever concocted”) for Bennett to complain that “your remarks on literature as such betray your fundamental inability to grasp what art is, really” (Wilson 56, 66, 70, 100; Wells, *Mankind* 372). The phrase suggests Bennett had harboured misgivings about Wells’s attitude toward art for some time. But there is no suggestion that he was offended by Wells’s treatment of literature in *Anticipations*.

In sum, Bennett, Stead, and other reviewers appear to have been sufficiently impressed by the intellectual display of *Anticipations* that what Wells was saying about the cognitive merit of his own medium evaded close examination. Notwithstanding here was a novelist issuing a brief but significant intellectual critique of his chosen craft, it is the revelation of Wells as a thinker, *not just* a novelist (to borrow the deprecatory rhetoric of Stead and the *Spectator* reviewer), that captured the attention of professional reviewers and Wells’s friends alike. But the methodological dualism Wells espouses in *Anticipations*—between the “diffidence” of social prophecy and fiction “concrete and definite,” between the satirical and illusory character of fictional predictions and the “frank inquiries” and “decorum” of the scientific approach—is not as absolute as the opening passage implies (*Anticipations* 1–2). Particularly intriguing, given Wells’s repudiation of artistic engagement in matters of sociological speculation, is his preference for induction over narration for its “decorum.”²⁵ In the following section I argue that the metaphorical exposition of Wells’s methodological dualism conflicts with his attempt at a rigorous distinction between science and art, preparing the ground for his later synthetic approach based on a defence of individual personality as the best means for comprehending existing forms of social organization, and imagining new ones.

Floating uncertainties

In this section I examine a talk entitled “The Discovery of the Future,” which Wells delivered at the Royal Institution’s Friday Evening Discourse for 24 January 1902.²⁶ It is his

²⁵ Even more intriguing given his attitude toward traditional aesthetic categories in his fiction reviewing for the *Saturday*: see Chapter 3, especially pp. 113–14 below.

²⁶ “Discovery” was first printed in the pages of *Nature*, under Richard Gregory’s editorship, for 6 February, and exists in multiple reprintings. The London publishing house T. Fisher Unwin released a pamphlet publication shortly thereafter, followed in 1906 and 1913 by republications by Fifeild, and 1921 and 1925 by Jonathan Cape (D. Smith, *Correspondence* 1:394; G. West 18). The 1913 Fifeild text contains minor alterations: see notes 32 and 34 below for details. American readers first encountered

second formulation of the methodological distinction between science and art. Again he derogates art as a means of social analysis and engagement. But here the conflict between method and metaphor comes to a head. I argue that Wells's use of metaphorical figures in the exposition of his argument in "Discovery," defending the application of inductive reasoning to speculation about the future, shows that his attempt at a rigorous dualism is untenable. I then show that in *Mankind in the Making*, a second series of essays intended to develop further the discussion of social development in *Anticipations*, Wells abandons the sceptical attitude about social objectives in literature of the previous outings. In later sections of this chapter I show this move led to his determination to integrate, rather than differentiate, aesthetic and social notions in a defence of imaginative literature as uniquely poised to analyse and interrogate society.

Differentiating between two "types of mind," Wells's argument in the Royal Institution lecture commences with a series of psychological or cognitive premises ("Discovery" 326). He terms the first type of mind "legal" and claims it is "the predominant type, the type of the majority of living people"; it is "retrospective in habit," interpreting "the things of the present, and giv[ing] value to this and den[ying] it to that, entirely with relation to the past" (326). A "second type," a "more modern and much less abundant type of mind, thinks constantly and by preference of things to come, and of present things mainly in relation to the results that must arise from them" (326).²⁷ The distinction, in which the "legal" mind is so termed because it operates according to laws and precedents and tries to "consistently ignore or condemn the thing that is only seeking to establish itself," while the second type is "perpetually attacking and altering the established order of things," reiterates an argument Wells made in the pages of the *Saturday Review* five years before the Royal Institution lecture (326). In an article propounding "Certain Critical Opinions," he diagnosed contemporary literary critics and reviewers, belonging to what he termed the "Academic School," with "a kind of lawyer's knowledge of literary precedent" and attacked their reliance on standards

the text in the Smithsonian Institution's *Annual Report* for 1902 (pp. 375–92). The text was subsequently reprinted, with further minor alterations, in the Atlantic edition of Wells's *Works* (vol. 4). Parrinder has since re-edited the text with corrections, variants, commentary and an extensive introduction in Parrinder, ed., *The Discovery of the Future with The Common-Sense of World Peace and The Human Adventure* (PNL, 1989). Parrinder notes that the talk is full of "imagery of falling and rising and of darkness and light" ("Introduction" 10). Here I argue that Wells's figurations directly challenge his argument for methodological dualism, for a distinction between scientific induction and "personal" insight.

²⁷ Finding the paper "vague, inexact, and rhetorical" in his autobiography, Wells alters the terminology to "past-regarding" and "future-regarding" respectively (*Experiment* 648).

derived from canonical works in a way that failed to grasp what was original and characteristic in contemporary literature (“Certain Critical Opinions” 32–33).²⁸ As in the earlier article, Wells now criticises the legal frame of mind for its conservative and dogmatic procedures, in contrast to which the “modern” mind is “creative,” exploiting the present as “material for the future,” “constructive in habit,” endowing value to present things according only “to the results that arise from them,” and essentially critical, “perpetually attacking and altering the established order of things” (326).²⁹ The approach anticipates “The Contemporary Novel,” where Wells would argue for a critical approach to novel-writing, one interrogating “every standard and rule for conduct” and all “social dogmas and ideals,” and insist that novelists could only be creative if unfettered by formal prescriptions, endowed with a “free hand” in methods and subject matter (“Contemporary Novel” 868, 872).³⁰

However, Wells repeats the methodological differentiations of *Anticipations* in the lecture, with claims that distinguish it from his reviewing practice on one hand and his later defence of the novel, on the other. The methodological point is the same, though where in *Anticipations* Wells made only passing reference to “forecasts and inductions of things to come” or “speculative inductions” and provided a few examples in a footnote, in “Discovery” he presents a more patient explication of his preferences in method (*Anticipations* 1–2).³¹ The two “types of mind” are “distinct methods,” he writes, “the method of reference to the past and the method of reference to the future” (326). As in *Anticipations*, he excludes literature as a means for comprehending the future. “Literature is for the most part history or history at one remove,” it is preoccupied with the past whereas “to-morrow is the eventful thing for us” (327). As if this remark is not sufficiently reductive, he finds “culture” itself to be a product of the retrospective mindset, “a mould of interpretation into which new things are thrust, a collection of standards, a sort of bed of Procrustes, to which all new expressions

²⁸ There is little doubt that Wells is reanimating the idea first publicised in his time as fiction reviewer for the *Saturday Review*, for he even reiterates the racial distinction “between pedant and maker, between past and future, the Chinese and English, of the intellectual world” made in “Certain Critical Opinions,” describing the “creative,” “active” mind to be characteristic of the West while the “legal,” “submissive” mind is “the mind of the oriental” (“Discovery” 326; “Certain Critical Opinions” 33). For detailed discussion of “Certain Critical Opinions” and its implications for Wells’s conception of the novel and the social efficacy of literature, see Chapter 3 below.

²⁹ Parrinder notes that the emphasis on “results” anticipates Wells’s later declaration of allegiance to Pragmatist philosophy (“Introduction” 9). I discuss the influence of British Pragmatism on Wells’s conception of art below, pp. 95–108.

³⁰ See Chapter 1, pp. 19–22 above.

³¹ See pp. 64–66 above for discussion.

must be lopped or stretched" (327).³² It is, once again, inductive generalisation that promises "a working knowledge of things in the future" (328). Literature tends to history but science "aims at prophecy"; its objective is to issue "confident forecasts" without which it would be "unsound and tentative . . . mere theorising, as evanescent as art talk or the phantoms politicians talk about" (328–29).³³ Wells dismisses as over-cautious the objection that society is too complex for an inductive approach. He admits it is true there can be no knowledge of a "personal future to correspond with our personal past" because there is no innate human mental faculty for comprehending or even envisaging the future, nothing "to correspond to the memory" or "having the same relation to the future that memory has to the past" (329). From the perspective of personal experience, the future is a "black non-existence," a seemingly "impenetrable, incurable, perpetual blackness," the sense of a personal future merely a "black ignorance at our very feet," a "black shadow" casting "a glamour of uncertainty and unreality over all the future" (326, 328).³⁴ But the "great inductive past of geology and archaeology," which have illuminated the "scenery" of the past and evoked "enlightening vistas" raises the possibility of "an inductive future"; beyond the reach of

³² The original text has "King Og" instead of "Procrustes." Wells acknowledges the error in response to a letter pointing out the slip printed in *Nature* (20 February 1902, 366; see also D. Smith, *Correspondence* 1:394); in this single instance I have preferred the revised Atlantic Edition text over the original *Nature* printing. See Parrinder's bibliographical note, "Introduction" 17. The slip is consistent with Wells's conception of the past as something sovereign and despotic.

³³ The endorsement of the prophetic "aim" in science contradicts Wells's earlier critique of scientific method, in an 1891 paper on "The Rediscovery of the Unique," as well as his critique of the attempt at a scientific sociology in "The So-Called Science of Sociology." Wells deprecated the predictive power of science in the earlier paper, claiming that whichever way a test by experiment turned out, a scientist would either have his cake or eat it: "here is science taking up the cast-off armour of religion and resting its claims on prophecy! The scientist predicts a planet, an element, or a formula, and the thing either comes almost as he said, or—he makes a discovery" (109). And responding to discussion subsequent to presenting his paper on sociology at a meeting of the Sociological Society in 1906, Wells notes, "I do not think you are ever going to foretell in sociological science" (Wells et al., "Discussion" 377). I discuss the relationship of the earlier paper to Wells's resolution of the dilemma between scientific and artistic modes of knowledge, pp. 84–85, 101–03 below.

³⁴ Wells would opt for "blank" over "black" in published version of the lecture from 1913. The Fifield (London) and Huebsch (New York) editions were the first to incorporate the adjectival emendation. See, for example, *Discovery of the Future* (London: Fifield 1913), pp. 5, 26. See also the bibliographical note in Parrinder, "Introduction" 17–18. Wells may have derived the metaphor from his earlier article on "The Rediscovery of the Unique," where he writes: "Science is a match that man has just got alight. He thought he was in a room—in moments of devotion, a temple—and that his light would be reflected from and display walls inscribed with wonderful secrets and pillars carved with philosophical systems wrought into harmony. It is a curious sensation, now that the preliminary splutter is over and the flame burns up clear, to see his hands lit and just a glimpse of himself and the patch he stands on visible, and around him, in place of all that human comfort and beauty he anticipated—darkness still" (111).

“report, rumour, tradition, and history” lies “a doubt and darkness as black . . . as futurity,” but science has provided a depiction “now fixed and finite for all time . . . the remoter past lit up and became a picture,” portending an “inductive knowledge” achieved by “a systematic exploration of the future,” generating “safe and serviceable generalisations upon countless important issues in the human destiny,” “a reasoned inductive view of the future that will serve us in politics, in morals, in social contrivances, and in a thousand spacious ways” (328–30). The model for understanding the future and making predictions is science, conceived as a process of inductive reasoning unencumbered by conservative cultural influences. Induction is the “intellectual method” that will “attenuate . . . the veil between ourselves and things to come” (328). Art and all of culture are too restricting and retrospective, lacking in creativity and the critical spirit. The claim for scientific superiority is essentially cognitive: it is only inductive science that can penetrate the “darkness” of “futurity.” It also denies a role for individual imagination. There can be no “inductive future” at the individual level: such “knowledge of the future we may hope to gain will be general and not individual” (330).

The methodological claims ally “Discovery” to *Anticipations*, for in both texts Wells dismisses art in favour of science as the means for confronting the future. There are figurative strategies in common, too, though in “Discovery” the figurative subtext undermines Wells’s dualism and aligns the lecture with his conception of the kind of socio-moral drama confronting twentieth-century man, such as he would evoke in “The Contemporary Novel” as part of his claim for the cognitive and critical significance of fiction.³⁵ In “Discovery,” Wells identifies the characteristic problem as a kind of “indecision” about moral imperatives:

This present time is a period of quite extraordinary uncertainty and indecision upon endless questions—moral questions, aesthetic questions, religious and political questions—upon which we should all of us be happier to feel assured and settled, and a very large amount of this floating uncertainty about these important matters is due to the fact that with most of us these two insufficiently distinguished ways of looking at things [the “legal” and the “creative” mental sets] are not only present together, but in actual conflict in our minds, in unsuspected conflict; we pass from one to the other heedlessly without any clear recognition of the fundamental difference in conclusions that exists between the two, and we do this with disastrous results to our confidence and to our consistency in dealing with all sorts of things. (326)

Wells spells out the “difference in conclusions”: a moral code may be derived “from the past, from some dogmatic injunction, some finally settled decree,” observing an inflexible “established morality”; or, one may “frankly regard morality as a means to an end,” conceiving of morals in relation to future consequences, breaking away altogether “from the

³⁵ See Chapter 1, pp. 19–20 above.

idea of a code dogmatically established for ever” (327). The struggle between these attitudes defines the uncertainty characteristic of contemporary socio-moral experience. Wells demands a decision be made between obeying “the real or imaginary imperatives of the past” and “the demands of some ideal of the future” (327). He had made his own decision by the time he wrote “The Contemporary Novel,” where similarly he defines modernity as a “seething and creative” historical moment, “a period of tightening and extending social organization,” before proceeding to defend the novel as a form of “criticism . . . of every standard and rule of conduct,” engaging with “political questions and religious questions and social questions” (“Contemporary Novel” 868, 873). However, where in the later formulation such “questions” are to be resolved by novelists, or at least explored in novels, “Discovery” follows *Anticipations*, not the 1911 formulation: literature is disqualified as a form of moral arbitration for want of serious commitment to the future. Furthermore, in its characterisation of the collective mentality as one of “floating uncertainty,” the passage quoted above reprises the figurative strategy of the previous work.³⁶ Writing in *Anticipations* of the collapse of “the old order” and the dissolution of what once were “definite classes” which have now “melted and mingled,” Wells depicts an age not merely disorientated but shipwrecked. A characteristic passage:

[T]here has appeared a vast intricate confusion of different sorts of people, some sailing about upon floating masses of irresponsible property, some buoyed by smaller fragments, some clinging desperately enough to insignificant atoms, a great and varied multitude swimming successfully without aid, or with an amount of aid that is negligible in relation to their own efforts, and an equally varied multitude of less capable ones clinging to the swimmers, clinging to the floating rich, or clutching empty-handed and thrust and sinking down. (*Anticipations* 82–83)

Such “drifting down” to a “chaotic” semblance of “structure” he terms a “process of deliquescence”; it characterises “the deliquescent society of the present time” (83–84, 103). In fact, the “floating” metaphor is a staple for Wells, who would reprise the trope in his next sociological work, *Mankind in the Making*, noting as a consequence of the “claim of . . . individualities over any general rules”—a “claim” that, as I discuss below, directly contradicts the preference for inductive methods in *Anticipations* and “Discovery” and puts Wells back on the path toward a defence of the novel as a form of sociological interrogation and intervention—that the “last temporary raft of a logical moral code goes to pieces at this,

³⁶ He would repeat the claim about the contemporary want for “certitude about moral values and standards of conduct” in “The Contemporary Novel” (876): see Chapter 1, p. 43 above. See also Chapter 4, note 24 below.

and its separated spars float here and there. So I will confess they float at present in my mind" (300).³⁷ He would reprise the figure again some thirty years later, writing in his autobiographical "Digression About Novels" that "the art of fiction floated on [an] assumption of social fixity" in the nineteenth century, before this "apparently permanent frame" or "rigid frame of values" became a "splintering frame" with repercussions for the novelist's craft (*Experiment* 494–95).³⁸

There is a remarkable degree of *figurative*, if not methodological continuity in Wells's writing on the question of contemporary socio-moral "questions" and how to answer them, over three decades. Effectively, there is no logical correlation between the consistency in metaphorical exposition of Wells's arguments and their contradictory methodological outcomes. The figurative structure of "Discovery"—the cognitive distinction between the "blackness" of "futurity" considered from the personal perspective and the "enlightening vistas" of science—actually undermines Wells's attempt at a rigorous methodological

³⁷ See the discussion of *Mankind in the Making*, pp. 81–85 below.

³⁸ See Chapter 1, pp. 42–43 above. Wells was not alone in drawing such conclusions about the moral predicament of twentieth-century man. Reviewing *Anticipations*, Stead reflected on how his fellow man seemed to be faring as he settled in to the new century. "We are adrift in a great ocean, without any port towards which to set our sails; and, to vary the metaphor, we have no solid standing-ground from which to envisage the endlessly varied phenomena which confront our pilgrimage from the cradle to the grave" ("Books of the Month" 639). Wells finds himself, Stead goes on, "adrift in the midst of a generation which has lost both chart and compass" and his response is "to ascertain from scientific measurement" the winds, tide, and "probable course which would be taken by the ships which are drifting apparently without any definite aim or in any definite direction" (639–40). The idea stuck: reviewing *Mankind in the Making* two years later, Stead once again invokes a world where "all are drifting more or less heedlessly, not knowing where the current is carrying us," thankful for "some courageous thinker who endeavours to forecast the trend of the drift" ("Notable Books" 411). It is possible that Wells provided Stead with the figurative hooks for his review in a meeting in November 1901 (the review quoted above appears in Stead's *Review of Reviews* for December). Wells had written to Stead in October suggesting they meet "about the third week of November" (qtd. in Baylen 61). During the meeting, their first, Wells and Stead discussed the serialised essays; Baylen suggests that Stead's review was written in response to this discussion (62). (Stead was further intrigued by "The Discovery of the Future" and tried, unsuccessfully, to secure the essays comprising *Mankind in the Making* for the *Review of Reviews*; thereafter he "sought Wells's assistance in a daring"—and ultimately disastrous—"publishing venture which he was preparing to launch in January 1904 . . . the *Daily Paper*": see Baylen 67). But no one person owns a metaphor, and as late as 1920, H. B. Usher, in a review of Wells's *Outline of History*, would write that life without faith in progress "would indeed be a gloomy voyage and chartless to a generation which has seen its creeds swept overboard and found its philosophies inaccurate . . . [W]e have this one star to steer by: the knowledge that our ship is on the whole proved seaworthy, that Humanity is at once our sacred passenger and our constant reinforcement, and that sometime and somewhere our successors will struggle into port" ("Occasional Notes" 687). Wells revives the trope in *Work, Wealth and Happiness* (1932): "now we all begin to realize we are living in the break-up of whatever system existed before our time, and that in a great disorder a new system may be coming into being. All sorts of forces are at work disorganizing us now but with a tantalizing air of producing some larger strange organization to which we must adapt our lives" (14).

dualism. For the metaphorical exposition of his case for scientific induction is in fact an appeal to the imagination. Wells comes close to admitting that imagination is as crucial to scientific knowledge as logical rigour where he describes the contributions of geology and archaeology as “enlightening vistas” comprising “a picture” of “the remoter past lit up” (“Discovery” 328–29). Similarly, his remark that “the imagination, unless it is strengthened by a very sound training in the laws of causation, wanders like a lost child in the blackness of things to come and returns—empty,” accommodates imagination, albeit with a significant *caveat* (328). The text of “Discovery” is, therefore, dual-faceted. It poses an argument for the exclusive access of inductive generalisation to the future. But Wells’s metaphorical exposition belies the importance of the creative imagination in piecing together inductive facts into something resembling a “picture.” Despite the figurative continuity in Wells’s reflections on the possibility of comprehending future forms of socio-moral organization after 1902, the lecture on “The Discovery of the Future” is the last time he would advance an argument for methodological dualism. After “Discovery,” Wells recommences his attempt, originating in his reviewing for the *Saturday*, to integrate aesthetic and social notions into a defence of imaginative literature and the novel.

Within a month or so of the Royal Institution lecture, Wells was at work on a new series of essays that began to appear in Courtney’s *Fortnightly* from September 1902 under the general heading *Mankind in the Making*.³⁹ In terms of his thoughts on the social role of imaginative literature, the new work was a pole apart from the earlier derogations in *Anticipations* and “Discovery.” Although Wells associated the book with the earlier essays and lecture, claiming his objective throughout was to present “a general theory of social

³⁹ Wells’s friend Graham Wallas was reviewing drafts of the new essays by mid-March 1902; Wells wrote Bennett in June that he (Wells) had “exhausted my poor little brains on the first half.” See D. Smith, *Correspondence* 1:397; Wilson 81. For details on Wells’s relationship with Wallas and his involvement in London intellectual circles at this time, see pp. 87–88 below. Chapman and Hall published the essays in book form, graced by a short preface by Wells and an appendix comprising a paper Wells had delivered at a meeting of the Fabian Society, on “Administrative Areas.” Although Wells dated the Preface he wrote for the book publication July 1903, it probably appeared once the *Fortnightly* instalments were complete, in September. The appearance of press reviews in October corroborates a September publication, as do Wilson 99 note 4, and Baylen 66. Wells culled the eleven essays to two while preparing the text for the Atlantic Edition: only the concluding paragraph of an essay on “Thought in the Modern State,” where he made arguments about social roles for literature, survived (this chapter forms part of the matter discussed below, pp. 83–84), along with essays on “The Problem of the Birth Supply” and “The Case for Republicanism.” Wells had decided that the original essays “were of unequal value” and not worth reprinting for the most part (*Works* 4:x). W. T. Stead, editor of the *Review of Reviews*, found “not a dull page” in the book but conceded “Wells will probably find much to correct, and perhaps a few things to erase,” within a decade (“Notable Books” 411).

development and of social and political conduct,” *Mankind in the Making* dropped the methodological dualism of the earlier texts and presented a defence of the novel on sociological grounds (*Mankind* v).⁴⁰ Wells had abandoned the endorsement of inductive methods, and embarked on an assessment of the relationship between individuals and social forces that would define his conception of the social role of literature until 1911 at least.

This new assessment occupies the middle ground between the earlier essays and lecture and “The Contemporary Novel” of 1911. As in the latter, where Wells would emphasise the novel’s inevitably (in his view) moral characteristics, its expression of moral “impressions” more or less skilfully arranged into a “study and judgment of conduct,” and the novel’s ability, unique among literary genres, to extend readers’ “range of understanding” by presenting social configurations that succeed or fail as they “convince you that *the thing was so*,” here he identifies as one of the “functions of literature” its ability “to enlarge and interpret experience,” thereby to improve judgments about individual moral choices, to “fill in the details” of one’s “individual moral code” (“Contemporary Novel” 866–67, 871–72; *Mankind* 301–02). Unlike “Discovery,” where the objective is a general moral code for society at large, arrived at through inductive generalisation, averaging out individual differences in the pursuit of an “inductive future,” in *Mankind* Wells defends literature as the means of engaging with moral problems at the personal level (“Discovery” 328–29). One arrives at an “individual” not a “logical” code. Moral rules in pursuit of “a higher order of social being” are well and good—he provides examples: “motherhood is a great and noble occupation for a good woman . . . to beget children and see them full grown in the world is the common triumph of life . . . to live for pleasure is not only wickedness, but folly,” and so on—but “between these data there are great interrogative blanks” that “no generalization will fill—cases, situations, temperaments” (300–01).⁴¹ Such is the effect of “the claim of . . . individualities over any general rules” (300). Even the idea that experience is to be the object of interpretation and not of inductive rationalisations contradicts the earlier position. In “Discovery,” Wells had defined “interpretation” as “a mould . . . a sort of bed of Procrustes,” while in the new book it is the key to comprehending reality (“Discovery” 327; *Mankind* 302). It is now literary methods that will reveal the socio-moral significance of human specifics.

⁴⁰ See Chapter 3, pp. 137–49 for a discussion of the relationship between Wells’s views on human evolution and his artistic preferences.

⁴¹ The remark recalls Wells’s emphasis on “temperament” in his rejection of rules of literary composition in an 1895 article written for the *Saturday Review*. See Chapter 3, p. 116 below.

The attempt to appear scientific is not altogether absent: Wells endows the novel with a semblance of scientific authority by conceiving of novels as “experiments in the ‘way of looking at’ various cases and situations” (302). Novels, he writes,

may be very misleading experiments, it is true, done with adulterated substances, dangerous chemicals, dirty flasks, and unsound balances; but that is a question of their quality and not of their nature, they are experiments for all that. A good novel may become a very potent and convincing experiment indeed. Books in these matters are often so much quieter and cooler as counsellors than friends. . . . And there, in truth, is my whole mind in this matter. (302; ellipsis in original)

One could hardly recommend this as a sound basis for a *critical* approach to the novel: as Wells notes, emphasising the novel’s characteristics or its “nature” leaves untouched questions of its “quality” other than the global distinction implied here, that a “good novel” is a good experiment in ways of looking, a bad one less so. In contradistinction to his mature formulation of social ends in the novel in “The Contemporary Novel,” where it is the depiction of a character’s “proceedings” that grounds its social function, here there are no specifics on which to form an impression of what makes a novel a good experiment and, it follows, a good novel for Wells. But for all that the passage implies a reductively instrumental conception of the novel, valued only for its capacity to experiment with perspectives, it marks a break with the attempts in *Anticipations* and “Discovery” to reject fiction as a viable means of social analysis.

This leads to a more nuanced treatment of the relationship between literature and social phenomena than one finds in the previous work. *Anticipations* had limited the involvement of literature in the New Republic to something “not too imaginative” and largely absent; here Wells produces a critical account of contemporary and future relations. Citing John Beattie Crozier’s “interesting and suggestive” three-volume *History of Intellectual Development* (1897–1901), Wells poses the possibility of a “literary apparatus that holds a people together” and blames “the lack of a sufficient literature” for the rise of “mutual misunderstandings” between the “incoordinated classes” of a fragmented society: “the only thing that can overcome these isolations and put the mass of intelligent men upon a common basis of understanding, is an abundant and almost universally influential contemporary literature” (358–60). He endorses the establishment of “critical literature,” a “monthly or weekly critical magazine” dealing with “contemporary fiction, with contemporary speculative literature, and with the style, logic, methods and vocabulary of scientific and philosophical writers,” and

argues it should be subsidised by the state because criticism is “an almost necessary preliminary to the hopeful treatment of the rest of the current of thought” (368–70).⁴² Authors should be allocated state-funded endowments, liberating them from the “accidents of the book market” so that they may discharge fully their obligations to their chosen art (375). The emphasis throughout is on the functional objectives of literature, and there is little that defends literature as valuable in its own right, without the social imperative and political ideal of the general cohesion of civilisation. Nonetheless, this is a significant development in light of Wells’s rejection of literature for meaningful social engagement in his previous formulations.

In short, *Mankind in the Making* is the work in which Wells transitions toward a positive conception of the possibility, at least, of social efficacy in fiction.⁴³ It is also where he delivers on what was only implied in the figurative subtext of “Discovery,” while denied in the argument about method: that individual imagination is to play a role in determining future socio-moral configurations. To insist on the “claim of . . . individualities” is not only to retract the earlier endorsement of inductive generalisations; it leads directly to a defence of the novel that, while still couched in scientific terminology (“experiments”) is now concerned with matters of intimate importance to individuals. In fact the “experiment” metaphor suggests Wells has abandoned the rigorous distinction he established in “The Discovery of the Future” between “inductive” and “personal” futures, and that the distinction in *Anticipations* between the “illusion” of fictional prophecy and the “demonstration” of inductive speculations is an exaggeration: to conceive of the novel as an “experiment,” even if only figuratively, blurs the distinction between literature and science he had insisted upon in the earlier texts.

In an 1891 paper on “The Rediscovery of the Unique,” also printed in the *Fortnightly*, Wells had argued that because “beings are unique, circumstances are unique,” that “we cannot think of regulating our conduct by wholesale dicta,” that “principles are wholesale dicta” and a poor substitute “for an individual study of cases” (110). These statements clearly

⁴² Such comments were likely viewed favourably by Stead, who had visions of “a new era of ‘Government by Journalism’ in which the ‘editor’s mandate’ would be ‘renewed day by day,’ while ‘his electors register[ed] their vote by voluntary payment of the daily pence’” (Dawson et al., “Introduction” 28). Stead sought Wells’s assistance in setting up a *Daily Paper* along these lines, though it proved to be a failure (Baylen 67).

⁴³ If effectively restores Wells to the position he had developed in his fiction reviews for the *Saturday*: see Chapter 3.

anticipate Wells's position in *Mankind in the Making*, where he places the claim of "individualities" over the jurisdiction of "general rules" and alludes to the "individual" basis of "moral choices" comprising one's "individual moral code" (*Mankind* 300). As I examine in Chapter 3, they also comprise the basis for aspects of Wells's reviewing practice.⁴⁴ Though he extends its basic premise into a claim about the possibility of social objectives in the novel, Wells does not refer, in *Mankind*, to the earlier paper. In the remainder of this chapter I examine the circumstances for Wells's reanimation of the earlier position. I suggest it is possible that his increasing association with London's intellectual elite not only encouraged his intellectual ambitions, it perhaps persuaded him to assert, in *Mankind in the Making*, a positive conception of socio-moral objectives in literature based on the principles outlined in the paper on the "The Rediscovery of the Unique." However, contemporary sociologists were typically antagonistic to Wells's proposals for a role for fiction in sociological analysis. More favourable conditions existed among members of the Oxford Philosophical Society, where Wells presented a lecture on "Scepticism of the Instrument," two months after the *Fortnightly* completed its serialisation of the *Mankind* essays. It is in this paper that Wells explicitly reasserts the position adopted in the "little paper" for 1891 ("Scepticism" 383). I suggest that although Wells's tacit reanimation of the earlier thesis in passages of *Mankind in the Making* reveals the continuities in his conception of the novel, the Oxford lecture presents the clearest grounds for his abandonment of the methodological dualism of *Anticipations* and "The Discovery of the Future" and its sceptical repercussions for the social efficacy of imaginative literature. Considered together, *Mankind* and "Scepticism" present the basic outline that would inform Wells's argument, in "The So-Called Science of Sociology," for a role for fiction in sociology, and later lead to his defence of the novel in its own right as a form of social analysis and criticism.⁴⁵

A romancer among gradgrinds

The record shows it was the political economist Sidney Webb (1859–1947) who first suggested to Wells that the opposition posed in *Anticipations* between social efficacy and creative imagination—the claim that fiction could "never be satisfactory" in sketching out the features of future social possibilities—might not hold in practice. In a December 1901 letter,

⁴⁴ See pp. 115–17 below.

⁴⁵ See the section headed "Schiller & Co.," p. 95 below.

Webb drew Wells's attention "to a side of your own 'anticipation' that you seem to undervalue, if not to ignore" (MacKenzie, *Letters* 2:144). He suggests Wells has exaggerated the scientific and professional attributes of the model New Republican; but making for "order, general health and comfort, and maximum productivity" in society "is a professional art in itself," Webb writes, before driving the point home: "It takes, for instance, more imagination to organize men than machines—even more poetry!" (2:144).⁴⁶ Wells had tried to validate his first non-fictional speculation about the future by conveying that he understood the difference between literary imagination and sociological speculation and that he was on the side of "serious" social thinkers; Sidney Webb's letter was the first indication that he might have overstated his case. However, notwithstanding the letter, attempts to forge a synthesis between imaginative and scientific approaches to questions about the future of society were not a significant feature of the contemporary sociological landscape.⁴⁷ Most sociologists saw literature, whether in the form of poetry or any other manifestation of the literary imagination, not as a methodological alternative but as a source of data for sociological analysis.

By comparison to the Continent, sociology in England was late to receive academic recognition in the form of a professorial chair, but its inchoate state clearly gave Wells an opening and perhaps contributed to his reception by sociologists, even if the response was not

⁴⁶ To some extent, Webb's letter anticipates Chesterton's review of *Anticipations*. For details of the review in which Chesterton found Wells's New Republicans to be "a race . . . without art," see p. 70 above.

⁴⁷ Edward Pease, secretary to the Fabian Society, wrote to Wells at the beginning of January 1902 suggesting he make the acquaintance of Sidney and Beatrice Webb. "[T]hey are pioneers of your New Republic," he wrote, adding that *Anticipations* was proof Wells was precisely what the Fabians needed, someone "who can also think ahead" (qtd. in MacKenzie and MacKenzie, *First Fabians* 323). Beatrice Webb had found *Anticipations* the "most remarkable book of the year" (*Diary* 2:226). The Webbs and Wells had met by 29 January 1902 (Wells would later recall them "riding very rapidly upon bicycles from the direction of London, offering certain criticisms of my general forecast and urging me to join and stimulate the Fabians"), when Wells wrote Pease that the Webbs had left him "ashamed of my indolence & mental dissipation & awfully afraid of Mrs. Webb" (qtd. in MacKenzie and MacKenzie, *Time Traveller* 170; *Works* 4:279). By the end of 1902, as a member of the Co-Efficients dining circle conceived by the Webbs, Wells was enjoying the company of Bertrand Russell, the Liberal politicians R. B. Haldane and Edward Grey, and fellow Fabians the Webbs and William Pember Reeves (MacKenzie and MacKenzie, *Time Traveller* 173; *First Fabians* 290). Wells had written of a class of "educated and intelligent efficient[sic]" in *Anticipations* (97). In a letter to Wells on 12 September 1902, Webb described his intentions for the club as follows: "It is proposed to . . . arrange for about 8 dinners a year, mostly at a restaurant at the members' own expense; that the subject of all discussion should be 'the aims, policy and method of imperial efficiency at home & abroad'; that the club is to be carefully kept unconnected with any person's name or party allegiance" (qtd. in MacKenzie and MacKenzie, *First Fabians* 290).

always sympathetic.⁴⁸ The term “sociology” and its cognates do not appear in *Anticipations*, but the book received plenty of attention from contemporary social scientists and political philosophers, and there is reasonable circumstantial evidence to suggest that the book opened doors to its author. In a November 1901 letter to Bennett, Wells predicted: “I am safe to get most of the comfortable *educated* London public,” referring to his expectations of moderate readership penetration (Wilson 68). In terms of the book’s reception by contemporary intellectuals, his prophecy had begun to materialise approximately six months earlier, within weeks of the *Fortnightly* commencing its run of the essays. Like Bennett and Stead, the political theorist and Fabian Socialist Graham Wallas was impressed by the intellectual range of the essays comprising *Anticipations* and did not wait for the end of the serial run to make Wells’s acquaintance (Wiener 77).⁴⁹ It was a formative and mutual meeting of minds: Wells would later review and comment on drafts of Wallas’s *Human Nature in Politics* (1908), and Wallas did the same for a number of books by Wells, commencing with *Mankind in the Making* and concluding with *The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind* in 1932; Wells would write in his autobiography that Wallas, “drooping, scholarly, and fastidiously lucid,” was “in my study reading and commenting very illuminatingly and usefully” on the work in progress shortly before Wallas’s death (Wells, *Mankind in the Making* viii; *Experiment* 244, 600; D. Smith, *Correspondence* 1:397; Wiener 78).⁵⁰ The pair enjoyed a fortnight’s walking

⁴⁸ A letter to then Prime Minister A. J. Balfour of May 1905 suggests Wells thought he stood as good a chance as any for an academic position in sociology: “There’s a good deal of activity in the directions of sociology and a certain amount of irregular disorganized endowment & I believe if I could be let loose in this field for a time I could give things a trend” (D. Smith, *Correspondence* 2:71). See also note 62 below. By 1903 publishers and reviewers were classifying as “sociological” his works of non-fiction: see, for example, the list of Wells’s works given in the front matter in the Chapman & Hall book publication of *Mankind in the Making*, where *Anticipations* appears under the heading “Sociological Essays” (n.p.). Collini observes that sociology enjoyed “no academic recognition” early in the century; “the first (and for a long time the only) Chair of sociology in Britain,” was awarded to L. T. Hobhouse in September 1907 (*Public Moralists* 243; *Liberalism and Sociology* 209). Lepenies suggests “the late institutionalization of sociology in England” was the result of “the early readiness of statisticians, officials and reformist politicians to apply sociological statistics to the solution of social problems: this infiltration of sociological knowledge into the administration made the security of sociology though an organized structure seems far less pressing a matter than it was on the continent” (154).

⁴⁹ Wiener has Wallas meeting Wells “by the late spring of 1901” which means they had met by the time the first two or three instalments of *Anticipations* had been printed (77). A letter from Sidney Webb to Wells indicates that Wells met Wallas before he met the Webbs: see MacKenzie and MacKenzie, *Time Traveller* 169; they have Wells meeting Wallas while he was living at Arnold House, where he took a three-year lease from 28 March 1899 after moving to Sandgate, Kent for his health (*Experiment* 597–98; MacKenzie and MacKenzie, *Time Traveller* 140, 168). Wells would later write that he first saw Wallas at a meeting at William Morris’s house in Hammersmith (Kelmescott House) in the early 1890s (“Professor Graham Wallas” 165).

⁵⁰ In an obituary written for the *Literary Guide and Rationalist Review*, Wells made special note of Wallas’s

tour of the Alps in the autumn of 1903 (*Experiment* 598; MacKenzie and MacKenzie, *Time Traveller* 169). “We argued and tramped for a fortnight among the Swiss mountains,” Wells would later write, “discussing our common doubts of contemporary democracy” during a journey that would give Wells part of the narrative premise for *A Modern Utopia* (“Professor Graham Wallas” 165).⁵¹ It was Wallas who, along with Shaw, nominated Wells for Fabian membership, and Wells served alongside Wallas, Hobson, and the holder of the inaugural academic chair in sociology in England, L. T. Hobhouse, on the London Sociological Society’s Council between 1904 and 1905.⁵²

The Sociological Society was established in June 1903 “to emancipate sociological

editorial contributions. “Always and particularly I like to check up with Wallas, and among my final memories of him I have him in the armchair in my study turning over a list he had prepared of comments, emendations, and criticisms of my last book, tapping the typescript with a pencil, and arguing in his high-pitched, deliberating voice. ‘I shouldn’t say that, you know. I don’t think it is quite fair to say that.’ For the last time. Death, when it touches me, will not trouble me, for I shall not know of it; but I hate more and more this plucking away of my friends” (“Professor Graham Wallas” 165–66).

⁵¹ In Chapter 1 of *A Modern Utopia* Wells’s narrator imagines being instantaneously transported to Utopia while hiking in the Alps: “We have tramped and botanised and come to a rest, and, sitting among rocks, we have eaten our lunch and finished our bottle of Yvorne, and fallen into a talk of Utopias . . . And behold! in the twinkling of an eye we are in that other world!” (*Works* 9:14–15).

⁵² Wallas, along with Shaw, Sydney Olivier, and Sidney Webb, comprised the “Big Four” Fabian thinkers, joining in 1886; he resigned from the Society in 1904, the year after Wells joined (Cole, *Story* 7–8; Wagar, *World State* 100 note). The best narrative of Wells’s involvement with the Fabian Society is the chapter on “New Worlds for Old” in MacKenzie and MacKenzie, *First Fabians* 328–52. The speculative essays in *Anticipations* certainly introduced Stead’s “ingenious romancer” to a new and influential audience (Stead, “Coming of the New Republic” 512). “At the age of thirty-four Wells suddenly found himself with a new public and an influence that surpassed anything that he had envisaged when he set out to write the series of articles for Courtney” (MacKenzie and MacKenzie, *Time Traveller* 168). But despite seeing four editions within a year, the reach of *Anticipations* should not be exaggerated: Russell notes in his autobiography that he had never heard of Wells before the Co-Efficients met (*Autobiography* 1:153). Elsewhere he recalls: “Webb informed me that Wells was a young man who, for the moment, wrote stories in the style of Jules Verne, but hoped, when he made his name and fortune, to devote himself to more serious work” (*Portraits* 82). Russell’s recollection does not strike me as entirely reliable here, for by the time Webb and Wells met, Wells had already set his mind to “serious” writing. See also Parrinder, *Critical Heritage* 13–14 for a comparison of responses to *Anticipations* in Britain, America, and Europe; D. Smith, *Desperately* 97 has a list of the kinds of invitations and club nominations Wells received in the wake of *Anticipations* and “The Discovery of the Future.” It was probably such developments in his intellectual and political networks that Wells had in mind when, in a preface written for a Russian translation of his works at the end of the decade, he would claim that “[t]he literary life is one of the modern forms of adventure” in which art was merely one of many ports of call: “One is lifted out of one’s narrow circumstances into familiar and unrestrained intercourse with a great variety of people. One sees the world. One meets philosophers, scientific men, soldiers, artists, professional men, politicians of all sorts, the rich, the great, and one may make such use of them as one can. One finds oneself no longer reading in books and papers, but hearing and touching at first hand the big discussions that sway men, the initiatives that shape human affairs” (qtd. in Ray, “Wells Tries” 141). The passage contains the perhaps unfortunate implication that “literary life” was, for Wells, merely a conduit from “narrow circumstances” to “the world” of all “human affairs,” with no intrinsic merit of its own.

science from the oversight of academic economists and British anthropologists,” and boasted among its members such names as Patrick Geddes, Hobhouse, Victor Branford, Karl Pearson, Francis Galton, and Benjamin Kidd (Halliday 379–81; Crook 248–49).⁵³ The first documented evidence of Wells’s involvement in the Society takes the form of printed discussion appearing alongside the publication of Galton’s May 1904 address to the Society on “Eugenics: Its Definition, Scope and Aims,” where Galton proposed professional research in eugenics and advocated intervention in marital union to “raise the average quality of our nation” (47, 49–50). The evidence reveals Wells, from the beginning of his association with the Society, was interested in defending the “claim” of individualities, the position he had asserted in *Mankind in the Making*, against ambitions for statistical scientific interventions in society. As part of the formal discussion of Galton’s paper among its auditors, including Kidd, Pearson, and Hobhouse, Wells responded that “the conscious selection of the best for reproduction will be impossible” because “to propose it is to display a fundamental misunderstanding of what individuality implies” and that “sterilisation of failures” is, therefore, the key to eugenic social intervention (Galton 60).⁵⁴ Appropriately, then, *Mankind* is cited as Wells’s qualification for his appointment to the Society’s Council: as I have argued above it is *Mankind* that, among Wells’s sociological writings after *Anticipations*, first proposes the importance of the circumstances bearing directly upon individual lives in contradistinction to inductive generalisations imposed upon social conceptions from above.⁵⁵

Perhaps nothing should be read into the fact that only Wells’s overtly sociological writing is cited as qualification for his appointment, though there is evidence that contemporary social scientists tended to view imaginative literature as, at best, a source of sociological data, not something that could define or shape sociological methods, as Wells would argue in “The So-Called Science of Sociology,” or even significantly contribute to the kind of “experiments” in modes of living that, in *Mankind in the Making*, he proposed as the basis for comprehending the effects of socio-moral forces (*Mankind* 302). In Chapter 3 I discuss Wells’s

⁵³ The Society was established formally in November 1903, following a conference and formation of a General Committee in June 1903: see the Society’s *Sociological Papers* vol. 1 (1904): 284. In addition to serving on the Society’s Council, 1904–05, Wells assisted the Editorial Committee with the production of the first volume of the *Papers*: see vol. 1 (1904): xi.

⁵⁴ “The So-Called Science of Sociology” also commences with criticism of Galton’s work (21). See MacLean 27–29 and 155–59 for discussion of Wells’s reaction to eugenics proposals, Galton’s in particular, in *The Time Machine*, *Anticipations*, and *A Modern Utopia*.

⁵⁵ Wells’s qualifications for his position on the Council are listed as “Author of ‘Mankind in the Making,’ &c.” in the two volumes of the *Sociological Papers* for 1904 and 1905 (n.p.).

response to Kidd's 1894 book *Social Evolution*, where Kidd suggested that literature merely reflects its social context, making it of interest to the sociologist because it provided "realistic pictures" of social configurations without directly influencing social change.⁵⁶ But Kidd was not the only one among his cohort to think this way about imaginative literature. In an address to a Society meeting at the end of October 1903, Branford claimed that "[t]he journalists and the novelists are the field-naturalists of sociology," that a novel, "when it is not a monument of aesthetic imbecility, is a dramatic presentation of chance observations in sociology and psychology," that because the "crude language of everyday experience gets refined into literature" that "literature is, or should be, tested and verified and systematized by sociological science," the latter claim foreshadowing Wells's own assertion that sociological method incorporate the testing of literary creations (Branford 95, 104). In "The So-Called Science of Sociology," a paper originally published in the *Independent Review* for May 1905 which Wells presented at a meeting of the Sociological Society on 26 February 1906, Wells defined literature as "knowledge rendered through personality"—the definition anticipates that of "The Contemporary Novel," where he defended the novel in terms of its expression of "the personality of the author" and defended its special status among forms of literature as "a study of the association and inter-reaction of individualised human beings"—and claimed, because social experience was effectively a matter of the relationship between individual minds and "that vast complex unique Being" that is society itself, that "the creation of Utopias" in imaginative literature, "and their exhaustive criticism . . . is the proper and distinctive method of sociology" ("So-Called" 31–32, 34; "Contemporary Novel" 865, 869).⁵⁷ Branford's paper shows, too, that the methodological preoccupations in *Anticipations*, "The Discovery of the Future," *Mankind in the Making*, and "The So-Called Science of Sociology" are not exclusively Wells's.⁵⁸ Branford's admissions that "[s]ome people assure us that sociology is scientifically a mere chimera" and that over-specialisation at such an early stage of the discipline augured "dangers" for sociological study, anticipate

⁵⁶ See pp. 139–43 below.

⁵⁷ See pp. 102–03 below for my discussion of Wells's argument, in his 1903 Oxford lecture on "Scepticism of the Instrument," for the relationship, which forms the basis of the methodological claim in "The So-Called Science of Sociology," between "individuality" and "things in general" ("Scepticism" 381). I discuss the response to the later paper below: see pp. 92–94 and note 64.

⁵⁸ See also Wells's remarks in the 1905 paper that "the main substance and altogether the most suggestive portion" of the Society's recently published volume of *Sociological Papers* "is devoted to the prevalent anxiety of its members as to what as a matter of fact sociology is," and that "[t]here is clearly a pervasive doubt whether there is any real approach being achieved" ("So-Called" 21–22, 23).

further claims in “The So-Called Science of Sociology,” that “in the common acceptance of the word ‘science,’ the subject is not a science at all,” and that the “contemplative observer” is better placed than professional specialists to adjudicate on the question of what kind of methods sociology should adopt (Branford, “Founders” 94; Wells, “So-Called” 21, 24).⁵⁹ But generally, Kidd and Branford considered imaginative literature to be part of the social matrix that comprised the object for study, not something that could contribute substantively to sociological method.

Similarly, Beatrice Webb valued Wells less for his literary “romancing” than his contribution of social hypotheses, effectively endorsing the derogation of fiction on methodological grounds in *Anticipations*. Shortly after first meeting Wells early in 1902, Webb noted in her diary some criticisms about the book as well as the sophistication of its author’s grasp of matters pertaining to political economy. She found Wells to exhibit “ignorance” about the manual worker’s lot and of administrative complexities and the nature of aristocracy, and the book to betray “certain crudities of criticism” (*Diary* 2:240). But: “We like him much,” she would write in a diary entry for 19 April 1904, while the Wellses and Webbs enjoyed two days’ company immediately after the first official meeting of the Sociological Society.⁶⁰ The diary entry registers the advantages of gathering a novelist into the sociological fold, and replicates Wells’s emphasis on the provisional nature of his speculations in *Anticipations*, while expressing the same kind of scepticism about fictional pursuits. Webb writes:

he is absolutely genuine and full of inventiveness, a ‘speculator’ in ideas, somewhat of a gambler but perfectly aware that his hypotheses are not verified. In one sense he is a romancer spoilt by romancing, but in the present stage of sociology he is useful to gradgrinds like ourselves in supplying us with loose generalisations which we can use as instruments of research. And we are useful to him in supplying an endless array of carefully sifted facts and broad administrative experience. (*Diary* 2:320)

The entry provides a marked contrast to Wells’s attempt in “The So-Called Science of Sociology” to arrange things the other way around, by subordinating methods in social

⁵⁹ Here Wells reprised a similar claim in *Mankind in the Making*: “There are phases in the development of every science when an incautious outsider may think himself almost necessary, when sketchiness ceases to be a sin, when the mere facts of irresponsibility and an untrained interest may permit a freshness, a freedom of mental gesture that would be inconvenient and compromising for the specialist” (*Mankind* vi).

⁶⁰ The diary suggests 19 and 20 April 1904 were the days in question (B. Webb, *Diary* 2:320). Lord Bryce’s “Introductory Address on the Use and Purpose of a Sociological Society” was delivered on 18 April.

research to the formulation of imaginative Utopias. While Wells's contribution to contemporary debate is to argue for the primacy of fiction in sociology, not as a source of data but as a means for comprehending the interface between personality and social manifestations or forms of organization, professional sociologists like Kidd and Branford and political economists like Webb saw the novel as something objective, an expression of social forces. To some extent, Wells's contribution to the Society's methodologizing provided the occasion for a stand-off between the defence of sociology upon scientific grounds and the allegation (the substance of Wells's argument in "So-Called") of the chimerical application of scientific methods and an over-reliance on inductive logic. Ironically, this makes "So-Called" a repudiation of the work that brought Wells to the attention of the sociologists. But Webb's distinction between "romancer" and "gradgrind" is pertinent: what Wells defends in the paper is the distinction he tacitly makes in *Mankind in the Making*, between what actually bears upon the question of human interest in sociological speculation, and the attempt to ally the human sciences to inductive methodologies.

This contrast appears in its most pure form in the response to Wells's paper upon its first publication in the *Independent Review* in May 1905 from John Beattie Crozier. In a rebuttal printed in the *Fortnightly* under the heading "Mr. Wells as a Sociologist," Crozier identified in the culminating claim regarding "the proper and distinctive method of sociology" the "weak, indeed the fatal spot, in Mr. Wells's sociology" (Crozier 419; Wells, "So-Called" 34). Crozier dismissed entirely what he correctly perceived to be Wells's attempt to subordinate scientific methods to imaginative literature. He found Wells to offer "no constructive scheme" for social change, assuming that merely imagining a Utopia is tantamount to it actually materialising: "All you have to do is give the order, and the old world will dislimn, and the fairy Utopia will take form and substance in its place, arising like a dream out of the mist, or the love goddess from the foam of the sea" (420). Crozier alleges that Wells makes a methodological category error, mistaking for a sociological problem a problem proper to "the novelist or dramatist," the "uniqueness or unlikeness of individuals on which he lays so much stress," and asks—illogically, in Crozier's view—that sociological theories and results are "to be brought before the bar of Utopias like his own, or those of Rousseau and the rest, for consideration or approval, instead of his and their Utopias being brought before the bar of Sociology" (422–23). Crozier would have none of it: "the thing is as absurd as if he were to ask the present exponents of Biology to stand cap-in-hand before the ancient creators of mermaids, centaurs, and other fabulous creatures of the imagination, and do homage to

them” (423). Wells’s treatment of Crozier in “The So-Called Science” might have generated much of the heat of the response: Wells (despite his apparent endorsement of Crozier’s work in *Mankind in the Making*) described Crozier’s *History of Intellectual Development* as one of a number of “large scale sketches of a proposed science rather than concrete beginnings and achievements” and continued: “No one will ever build on these writers one feels; new men must begin again on the still vacant site” (“So-Called” 23).⁶¹

Wells’s response to Crozier’s critique conveniently summarises his position. “The decent path of sociological distinction is . . . not for my feet, nor academic laurels for my brow,” he admits, while reiterating that sociology’s “proper method” is “the old, various and literary way, the Utopian way, of Plato, of More, of Bacon, and not the nineteenth century pneumatic style, with its constant invocation to ‘biology’ and ‘scientific’ history and its incessant unjustifiable pretension to exactitude and progress” (“Is Sociology a Science?” 764).⁶² Imaginative literature is to provide the antidote to the previous century’s exaggeration

⁶¹ One of a number of changes Wells makes to the version of the talk presented to the Sociological Society is to delete those summary remarks. Nevertheless, Crozier remained a committed adversary. In an article originally printed in the *Fortnightly* for May 1908, reprinted as a chapter on “The Fabians and Parliamentarians” in Crozier’s *Sociology Applied to Practical Politics* (1911), he accused Wells, along with Fabians in general, of “a flat ineptitude” in their assumptions about political intervention (51). His *Last Words on Great Issues* (1917) continued the assault on Wells’s perceived lack of constructiveness: “he suggests that the only true plan for a Philosopher, whether of Morals of Politics or Religion, is to send up his own individual kite, as it were, and let the crowd below, gazing upward at the show, choose each man for himself, without any compulsion, and through his own eye-glass, which would best suit himself, according to his own taste, affinity, inclination or prepossession” (2). He even has an interlocutor in the book complain about Wells’s polemical style for being “in extremely bad taste and ‘form’ among ‘gentlemen’” (44). See p. 83 above for Wells’s citation of Crozier’s *History of Intellectual Development* in *Mankind in the Making*.

⁶² Around the time of his association with the Society, Wells seems to have thought there *was* some possibility of obtaining an academic chair in sociology. A letter to Beatrice Webb (29 April 1904), possibly a response to conversations during the two days the Webbs entertained the Wellses, accuses her of “knock[ing] the stuffing out of the arguments that might find a chair of sociology for *me*—not Kidd, not Geddes, not that flimsy thing Westermarck, but *me* to fill” (D. Smith, *Correspondence* 2:25). That Wells possessed academic pretensions is indisputable: in a letter of 10 May 1905 to then Prime Minister A. J. Balfour (a month after the publication of *A Modern Utopia* and the same month that “The So-Called Science of Sociology” appeared in the *Independent*) he requested an endowment to free him from the constraints of commercial publishing so that he could concentrate his efforts on a sociology textbook, and even suggests his own appointment to some kind of adjunct academic post to assist in the undertaking. The demands of the publishing trade necessitate some “ingenious adjustment of what I have to say to what the reading public supposes it wants,” Wells writes, applying to his own circumstances the kind of complaint he had made about the writer’s lot in *Mankind in the Making*; see p. 84 above. “I have thought, for example, of a text-book of Sociology that I venture would be a seminal sort of work. There’s a good deal of activity in the directions of sociology and a certain amount of irregular disorganized endowment & I believe if I could be let loose in this field for a time I could give things a trend” (D. Smith, *Correspondence* 2:71). He refers the P. M. to *A Modern Utopia*, which “[m]y publisher will have sent you [Y]ou can scarcely open it at any point without discovering vistas

of the role of inductive methods in social and historical analysis. “I shall count myself fortunate if it is given me in any measure to help rescue sociological questions, the only questions that really interest adult human beings, from the sea of abstractions, from the seas of thinnest intellectual gruel, under which the nineteenth century, so busy and preoccupied with so many things, permitted them to be submerged” (765). The exchange between Wells and Crozier identifies what is at stake in Wells’s intervention: it is to be a defence of human interest against scientific abstraction. But, Crozier objects, Wells is vague on the links between personality and social realities. Indeed, Wells laid out an intriguing critique of the application of inductive methods to sociological study, but beyond suggesting “a sort of dream book of huge dimensions, in reality perhaps dispersed in many volumes by many hands, upon the Ideal Society,” a book to serve as “the backbone of sociology,” against which existing work is to be arranged, and conceived on the model of the zoologist George Rolleston’s comparative anatomy textbook *Forms of Animal Life* (1870), he made few constructive remarks about his sociological method, admitting some reluctance to “define its relations overmuch” (“So-Called” 36).⁶³

To summarise: the reception of Wells’s non-fiction writings on social development by the London sociological and political-economic cohort brought Stead’s “ingenious romancer” into an environment that did not in fact provide germane conditions for the development of his defence of human specifics and his assertion of the “claim of . . . individualities” in a

along which it is hopeless to attempt to lure the book-hungry public & from which I have, very reluctantly, to turn:” (2:72). He says the letter is “a passing remark, an aspiration,” but: “it would be well if instead of being an intellectual free lance I was brought into relation with the organized thought & the university system of the country. I think there ought to be some sort of post or fellowship for me in that system, that I merit a certain stand & security” (2:72–73). D. Smith adds that Balfour’s Private Parliamentary Secretary advised that Wells made a good case, but warned of the possible outcry should an author already making over £1,000 a year be granted such an appointment (2:73 note). Smith also notes that “Wells was actively seeking a university position” in the spring of 1904, having given a public lecture or two, and was possibly “encouraged to think” that the lectures were preliminary to obtaining an academic post (2:26–27 note). The MacKenzies suggest that Fabian praise for *A Modern Utopia* flattered Wells and “touched the messianic streak in his personality,” convincing him that he could really be a political prophet (*First Fabians* 326). He may have formed the conceit earlier, however: in an article for American audiences in *Cosmopolitan Magazine* (August 1902) on “Herbert George Wells and His Work,” Bennett notes that “no less serious person than Mr. William Archer has proposed in a London newspaper that he [Wells] should be endowed with an annual income on condition of continuing to prophesy” (Wilson 260). The article in question is Archer’s “Study and Stage” in the London *Morning Leader* for 8 March 1902, p. 4.

⁶³ The critique of inductivism in “The So-Called Science of Sociology” reprises the argument of his 1891 paper on “The Rediscovery of the Unique,” and is based on a clarification of the argument in Wells’s November 1903 address to the Oxford Philosophical Society on “Scepticism of the Instrument.” For a summary of the critique in both papers, see pp. 101–04 in the following section of this chapter.

defence of the novel as a form of sociological analysis (Stead, “Coming of the New Republic” 512; Wells, *Mankind* 300). Kidd and Branford admitted literature within the sociological purview only as a source of social data; Beatrice Webb found the “romancer” to be in a poor position to contribute to sociological research—but admitted Wells was well equipped to generate social hypotheses.⁶⁴ Her finding reiterates the tacit preference for intellectual over fictional pursuits in Stead’s reviews of *Anticipations*, and endorses the methodological dualism of *Anticipations* and “The Discovery of the Future.”⁶⁵ There is no evidence to explain the change in attitude between “Discovery” and *Mankind in the Making*, from the rejection of fiction in matters of sociological analysis to the defence of the novel as a kind of social experiment, a claim that is allied to Wells’s critique of sociological methods in “The So-Called Science of Sociology.” It is possible that Sidney Webb’s rejoinder, that it takes “more imagination . . . even more poetry” than Wells was willing to admit in *Anticipations* to achieve tangible social change, encouraged Wells to abandon the scepticism with which he commenced the century. But that is merely a hypothesis. The contemporary sociological scene rather enforced than rebutted the methodological distinctions of *Anticipations* and “Discovery.”

To examine the conditions that *were* favourable for the development of the tentative defence of the individual and of the social role of literature in *Mankind in the Making* into the more substantial claims in “The So-Called Science of Sociology” and, later, “The Contemporary Novel,” I turn now to the lecture Wells read before the Oxford Philosophical Society, eighteen months before the first publication of the paper on sociology and Utopias.

Schiller & Co.

Wells read a lecture on “Scepticism of the Instrument” to the Society’s meeting for Sunday, 8 November 1903, two months after the *Fortnightly* completed its run of the essays comprising *Mankind in the Making*. Most of what is known of the precise circumstances in the lecture’s origin is provided by Wells, who introduces his talk by describing an invitation—it “flattered” him “exceedingly”—from the Society’s secretary, Henry Sturt, followed by receipt of the Society’s four-hundred-page “manifesto,” *Personal Idealism* (1902), which Sturt

⁶⁴ When Wells read his paper to a meeting of the Society on 26 February 1906, Kidd found Wells’s arguments “drastic,” and urged that sociology continue to aim at a science “of society and not of the individual” (“Discussion” 372).

⁶⁵ See pp. 64, 76–77 above.

edited, a volume consisting of eight long and technical essays by members of the Society (“Scepticism” 379).⁶⁶ The book “crossed a postcard” from Wells about the subject of his talk: “You must imagine after that a decent pause, broken only by a sound of turning leaves and by an occasional sigh” (379). The lecture must have been well received, for Wells wasted no time looking for a publisher, writing a letter to Henry Newbolt, editor of the *Monthly Review*, the next day. “I have just read to the Philosophical Society of this most amiable & hospitable place a little paper called ‘Skepticism of the Instrument’ which they seem to think rather a lark,” Wells writes, boasting of the philosophical currency of his effort: “It’s a little in the way of ‘Pragmatism’ the new doctrine expounded by Schiller & Co., sometimes with them and sometimes joggling them in their stomachs if you follow me. Would you care to have it for the *New Review*?” (D. Smith, *Correspondence* 1:435).⁶⁷ There is also evidence that the process involved in composing the paper, and the response Wells received, contributed to his creative output. He posted a copy of the lecture to then Prime Minister A. J. Balfour, who had sent Wells a copy of his recent presidential address to the British Association for the Advancement of Science; in the accompanying letter (26 August 1904), Wells refers to how he has “been trying to work out the conception of a modern Utopia in harmony with [the] fundamental incertitude” expressed in the Oxford lecture “and I shall inflict it upon you in due course” (D. Smith, *Correspondence* 2:41).⁶⁸ It is the objective of this section to explore the relationship between Wells’s argument in “Scepticism” and the philosophical thought of “Schiller & Co.” (the reference is to the British pragmatist philosopher Ferdinand Canning Scott Schiller, 1864–1937) as well as to examine how the Oxford paper contributed to the development of

⁶⁶ C. Webb suggests it was the Society’s “practice from time to time to invite distinguished strangers to read papers” (185). Unfortunately there is nothing about the kinds of speakers invited, and there is no record of any discussion between Wells and Society members after the talk. Copleston notes that *Personal Idealism* was the product of discussion among Society members between 1898, when the Society was established, and the date of publication (345). The volume was a work in progress at the time Wells’s *Anticipations* essays were appearing in the *Fortnightly*. In the preface Sturt says the idea for the volume occurred to him in 1900, and one of a series of satirical limericks on modern philosophy in the parody journal *Mind!* (Christmas 1901), the work of F. C. S. Schiller (Abel, *Humanistic Pragmatism* 313), refers to the book as “forthcoming” (Sturt v; [Schiller], *Mind!* 106). There is no reason to suspect Wells knew of the book prior to Sturt’s gift. See Schiller, *Humanism* viii and C. Webb 185 for the “manifesto” claim.

⁶⁷ The reference to the *New Review* is an error, as Wells acknowledged in a subsequent letter (*Correspondence* 1:435). Newbolt’s *Review* did not take the paper, which was printed in the established Oxford philosophical journal *Mind* for July 1904.

⁶⁸ With minor revisions, “Scepticism of the Instrument” appeared as an appendix in the Chapman & Hall book publication of *A Modern Utopia*. In a preface written for the Atlantic edition reprinting of *Utopia*, Wells reverses the chronology implied in the letter to Balfour, suggesting that the Oxford lecture “enlarged upon and cleared up various issues raised in ‘A Modern Utopia’” (*Works* 9:xi)

Wells's thought on the role of literature in relation to society.⁶⁹ The circumstances of the talk provoked Wells into an explicit statement of the relationship between his own general philosophy and the concept of personality. Here he explicitly revives the earlier argument, outlined in his 1891 paper "The Rediscovery of the Unique," for the priority of the individual case over general principles. The lecture is the clearest sign after *Anticipations* that Wells had abandoned that book's scepticism about the cognitive effects of literature and, along with *Mankind in the Making*, it sets the agenda for Wells's defence of imaginative literature to 1911 and beyond.

No detailed commentary on Wells's Oxford lecture exists. A brief account in Hynes's book *The Edwardian Turn of Mind*, in which he reduces the lecture to "nothing more than a pseudo-philosophical basis for anarchy" and attributes the Society's interest in Wells to "two 'modern' sources of knowledge not open to most Oxford philosophers," his "under-educated lower-middle" class background and his "entirely scientific" training, seems to be the most detailed account—and it is not very detailed (104).⁷⁰ But Wells considered the paper significant enough to revise it for republication in an Appendix accompanying the book publication of *A Modern Utopia*, and to expand upon the argument in the book in which he explicitly outlines his general philosophical position, *First and Last Things* (1908).⁷¹ Wagar finds that the lecture enjoyed nugatory philosophical influence (*World State* 105). But this must be

⁶⁹ See note 74 for background on Schiller.

⁷⁰ I respond to Hynes's claim in the conclusion to this chapter. A passage in Edwin Slosson's chapter on Wells in *Six Major Prophets* (1917) contends with Hynes for the most detailed response. Schiller is one of the other five of Slosson's "major prophets," along with Bernard Shaw, Chesterton, John Dewey, and the German philosopher and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature (1908) Rudolf Eucken, and I discuss some of his findings below. A list, as follows here, of critical works mentioning the talk looks impressive enough, though each item represents merely a passing reference. Parrinder finds the paper to present a "personal statement of [Wells's] metaphysical creed" and suggests affinity with the "the philosophy of William James" (*Shadows* 101). Hardy compares Wells's resistance to logical abstraction in the talk to Lakoff's thoughts on linguistic categories (201). MacLean compares Wells's emphasis on individual uniqueness with J. S. Mill's thoughts on the development of character in *On Liberty* (175). Quamen briefly considers the Oxford lecture in the context of Wells's challenges to traditional literary genres (69–70, 71). Wagar claims the influence of the lecture among philosophical circles was negligible (*World State* 105). Hughes finds in it merely a rehash of Wells's 1891 essay on "The Rediscovery of the Unique" ("Mood" 69). And Stiles quotes from the paper to illustrate points in her reading of *Moreau* (332). Biographies by the MacKenzies, Dickson, and D. Smith do not mention the lecture.

⁷¹ Alterations to the *Utopia* version include the addition of the phrase, which Wells slightly misquotes in his autobiography as representative of the argument as a whole, "*The forceps of the mind are clumsy forceps, and crush the truth a little in taking hold of it*" (*Works* 9:342; *Experiment* 224). Parrinder notes that I. A. Richards was more impressed by "Scepticism" than by any other work by Wells (*Shadows* 5 note 6). See *First and Last Things* (1908) 7–38 for Wells's development of the argument presented in "Scepticism."

weighed against Schiller's estimation of Wells's lecture as "brilliant," his impression that in Wells he had found a fellow Pragmatist, and his and others' appropriation of the phrase "scepticism of the instrument," originating with Wells, in their own writing, not to mention the devotion of nine close pages of counter-argument supplied by the eminent British logician Philip E. B. Jourdain in an article on Bergson and Wells.⁷²

Wells struggled with the essays in *Personal Idealism*, with technical terms in Latin and Greek, "tongues unknown to me," of which he had complained, in *Mankind in the Making*, that they not only marred "Oxford metaphysical writings" but were useless "for the training of the larger mass of modern men" ("Scepticism" 392; *Mankind* 334). Just as repelling were "passages of Hegelian . . . more terrible to a simple man than Greek" and the baroque style of some contributions; he singled out an essay on "The Future of Ethics" by theologian and historian F. W. Bussell for special comment, "a tangle of Narcissus and Hylas and Naiads and the Judaeo-Christian ideal and Nietzsche all appealing forcibly down the same

⁷² Schiller described the lecture as "brilliant" in a review of *A Modern Utopia* for *Nature*, August 1905 ("Sociological Speculations" 337). He used the phrase "scepticism of the instrument" in a review of Hans Vaihinger's *Die Philosophie des Als Ob* (1911): see *Mind* n.s. 21 (1912): 93–103, 96–97; again in a review of "New Books," *Mind* n.s. 28 (1919): 362–65, 362. (Schiller makes an appearance as Doctor Quiller in *Marriage*, where Wells attacked the intellectual narrowness of philosophical conceptions: this seems unfortunate given Schiller's enthusiasm for Wells's work.) The psychologist William McDougall uses the phrase to express his dismay that theorists could arrive at different conclusions departing from the same point: "The fact that two persons [Lloyd Morgan and McDougall], accepting and honestly considering the same facts, do disagree so completely as to their bearing on theory . . . tends to 'scepticism of the instrument.'" See McDougall, "Dr. Lloyd Morgan on Consonance of Welfare and Pleasure," *Mind* n.s. 38 (1929): 77–83, 77. The phrase appears in A. D. Lindsay's *Philosophy of Bergson* (1911), p. 12, where Lindsay refers to Wells's position. Schiller gave a copy of *A Modern Utopia* to William James during a visit by James to Oxford: see James's letter to Wells, 6 June 1905 (W. James, *Letters* 2:230–1). The gift may have augmented Wells's intellectual standing: a letter from James to the essayist and critic John Jay Chapman (18 May 1906) sees Wells "counted in" by James among the movers and shakers of a "new movement" in the "world of thought" along with names like John Dewey, Schiller, and William James himself (2:257). And in a letter of 28 November 1908, James complimented Wells on his latest doctrinal effort, *First and Last Things*, finding the book "a great achievement" and affirming a statement Wells had made in his Oxford lecture, that philosophy is as much the realm of the amateur as the professional. Wells had written: "Philosophy must surely remain as wide as thought, as general as literature, as comprehensive as anything, and it is absurd to talk of a professional specialisation that takes everything for its province" ("Scepticism" 379–80). James wrote Wells: "the simplicity of your statements ought to make us 'professionals' blush," and continued: "I have been 35 years on the way to similar conclusions—simply because I started as a professional and had to *débrouiller* them all from the traditional school rubbish. . . . This book is worth any 100 volumes on Metaphysics and any 200 on Ethics, of the ordinary sort" (*Letters* 2:316). For the claim that Schiller considered Wells a Pragmatist, see Abel, *Pragmatic Humanism* 12; the view is corroborated by the editor of an annotated bibliography of pragmatist works, who finds the position articulated in Wells's Oxford lecture to be "in line with pragmatism" (Shook 64). In his article on Bergson and Wells, Jourdain responds not directly to "Scepticism" but to *First and Last Things* but he focuses on the critique of logic Wells had presented in the Oxford lecture, and which he used as the basis for his discussion in the later work. See Jourdain, "Logic, M. Bergson, and Mr. H. G. Wells," *Hibbert Journal* 10 (1911): 835–845.

paragraph,” but admits he found the “eight witnesses very difficult as a whole” (“Scepticism” 392–93).⁷³ He did find consolation in one contribution, however: “it is probable that I do at last emerge somewhere near to and parallel with what you are calling here Pragmatism and Humanism as I find these terms defined by Mr. Schiller” (381). Wells reprised the theme at the end of the lecture: “as I read Mr. Schiller’s Humanism there are times when I say almost without hesitation, this is about where I am” (393). Wells’s near contemporary, Schiller was the leading British proponent of philosophical Pragmatism; Wells’s remarks on Schiller in “Scepticism” suggest he was sufficiently intrigued by Schiller’s philosophy to have sought out, for consultation alongside *Personal Idealism*, Schiller’s 1903 book *Humanism*. It helped, no doubt, that Schiller’s prose was fairly easy-going.⁷⁴

It is likely that the Oxford philosophers’ interest in Wells was at least partly doctrinal. There is no evidence to suggest that Schiller was familiar with Wells’s latest effort before he

⁷³ Wells would later complain, in *First and Last Things*, that “erudition and accumulated and alien literature . . . make metaphysics obscure” (3). He extended his critique of “the absurd condition that [philosophy] should be studied in connection with the badly-taught and little known language of ancient Greece” in later editions of the book, noting that at Oxford in particular, philosophy “was stuck away into remote pretentious courses, behind barriers of Greek linguistic learning” ([1929] 2, 4). For Russell’s essay see Sturt 336–68; the offending paragraph is on pp. 356–59.

⁷⁴ Schiller wrote “so that he could be understood by the layman” (Abel, *Humanistic Pragmatism* 11). Slosson suggests that Schiller owed his appointment at Oxford in part to the lucidity of his first book, his doctoral thesis, published anonymously as *Riddles of the Sphinx* in 1891 (203). The book was republished in 1894 with Schiller’s name on the title page (Copleston 347). A note added to the revised version of the lecture appended to *A Modern Utopia* suggests that where Wells writes “Mr. Schiller’s Humanism” in “Scepticism,” he has Schiller’s book by that name in mind. For this version, Wells dropped the paragraphs dealing with his response to *Personal Idealism* and added a note to the foot of the revised copy: “Here followed certain comments upon *Personal Idealism*, and Mr. F. C. S. Schiller’s *Humanism*, of no particular value” (*Modern Utopia* 393). If the italics are not a printing error—Schiller termed his brand of pragmatism, as well as his book, “Humanism”—then Wells must have been aware of the book before he went up to Oxford. *Humanism* was in press around the time Wells received the Oxford invitation. Schiller’s preface is dated August 1903 and although reviews do not appear in England before January 1904 (and most some months later), the book was on sale before the end of 1903: the acquisition stamp in a copy I have seen, held by Schiller’s *alma mater* Cornell University, is dated December 1903. The book was printed in Edinburgh; its arrival in Ithaca would not have been immediate. Subjecting his examiners to a thorough critique based on principles elucidated in his thesis, Schiller “flunked in Cornell on his oral examination for Ph.D. in Philosophy” (Slosson 202). During his tenure at Oxford, commencing 1897, Schiller promoted his philosophical and social views passionately, ultimately alienating the Oxford philosophical establishment, precipitating his return to the United States permanently from 1935, taking a position at the University of Southern California where he had been visiting professor from 1926. Edwin Slosson, who met Schiller at Oxford, recalls him thus: “Where the conflict rages most fiercely there Schiller will be seen in the midst of the combatants, thrusting in all directions at the weak points in their armour” (195). See also Copleston 346–47. Bertrand Russell identifies Schiller as the “literary” representative of Pragmatism, with William James and John Dewey the “religious” and “scientific” representatives respectively (*Sceptical Essays* 60).

heard him speak, but there are compelling similarities in approach.⁷⁵ Schiller, in his contribution to *Personal Idealism*, an essay on “Axioms as Postulates” (one commentator describes it as “the first and perhaps best statement” of British Pragmatism), outlined a view on the relationship between human knowledge and general cosmic development that is strikingly alike Wells’s in its emphasis on “experiment” (C. Webb 185). Schiller argued that all experience is experiment, that the entire field of human activity, all social custom, all science, and all art are an “active experimenting,” and that the cosmos itself “grows . . . by experiment,” its development directed “by the needs of life and the desires which correspond to those needs” (Schiller, “Axioms” 56). The emphasis on experiment in the human sphere and the justification of an experimental approach in thought, art, and the entire socio-moral sphere and nature itself, would have been familiar to Wells, who had commenced *Mankind in the Making* by stating his intention to provide a “general theory of social development” from an evolutionary perspective, and later insisted that “each birth [is] an unprecedented experiment,” that “the essential fact in individual life is experiment,” that individuality itself “is experiment,” that knowledge is formed through experimentation, and, finally, that novels are “experiments in the ‘way of looking at’” the circumstances affecting individual lives (*Mankind* 18, 67, 124, 149, 152, 220, 302). Also, Wells’s position, based on his conviction that philosophical ideas must relate to human interests, has significant points of intersection with Schiller’s Pragmatism.

In his contribution to *Personal Idealism* and his book on *Humanism*, Schiller rejected “intellectualism” in contemporary philosophy, describing it as “a libel on our nature” abstracting from and erasing individuality and agency, and called for a return to common-sense philosophy, centred on human experience, free of technical jargon (“Axioms” 84, 127–28; *Humanism* xvii, xix–xx).⁷⁶ He held knowledge to be relative to “immediate experience”

⁷⁵ Also, Schiller reviewed *A Modern Utopia*, the book publication of which included the lecture on “Scepticism” in an appendix, for *Nature* in August 1905, where he described Wells’s Oxford lecture as “brilliant” and showed he was familiar with *The Time Machine*, *When the Sleeper Awakes*, *Anticipations*, and *Mankind in the Making* (Schiller, “Sociological Speculations” 337).

⁷⁶ Schiller had lampooned the Oxford Idealist F. H. Bradley and his conception of the Absolute in the satirical mock-philosophical journal *Mind!* two years earlier, and reprised the theme in his contribution to *Personal Idealism*, writing that “philosophic problems” of interest to the Absolutists had “no earthly connection with practical life” (129). He was not alone: contributions to the book by G. F. Scott, W. R. Boyce Gibson, and Hastings Rashdall all included critiques of Bradley’s metaphysics (see esp. pp. 45–46, 191, 378–79, 384 note 2, 392–93). Wells would pay tacit homage to such procedure in his Oxford lecture, rejecting what he called “the illusion of positive reality” in “negative” philosophical concepts like “the Absolute, the Infinite . . . Omniscience,” none of which are “real existences” (“Scepticism” 387).

and the value of inferences about reality to be determined by the degree to which they effect transformations of reality (*Humanism* 199). Wells would present a similar argument in the Oxford lecture. Positing different planes of existence, he pointed out that “the universe of molecular physics,” for example, “is at a different level from the universe of common experience,” that what characterises the plane of “common sensation and common experience” is the “indisputable fact” of “man’s freedom of will,” despite the fact that at the subatomic level there subsists “a world of inevitable consequences, a rigid succession of cause and effect” (“Scepticism” 389–90). Wells cautions against reasoning from one level to another: “through reasoning between terms not in the same plane, an enormous amount of confusion, perplexity and mental deadlocking occurs,” but one can no more enforce the statistical determinism of atomic physics in human activity than one can convincingly endorse moral concepts in theories about matter (390). In short, stressing the importance of agency and of comprehending the specific character of human experience without imposing concepts from alternate planes, Wells repeats in different terms Schiller’s defence of human agency in the world of thought.

There are other significant doctrinal similarities. Reviving an argument first outlined in “The Rediscovery of the Unique,” Wells presents a critique of logical reasoning in philosophy. He explains that his scientific training in comparative anatomy had set him to thinking that the human mind and its “mental predispositions,” as much the products of an evolutionary process of “adaptations and approximations” as any anatomical feature, were “profoundly provisional”; further, that as biological species are as much defined by individual variations as by “the properties that constitute the specific definition,” attempts at classification, not just in biology but in all modes of thought, were provisional, too, and abstracted from reality (“Scepticism” 383–84). “My opening scepticism is essentially a doubt about the objective reality of classification,” he continues: “classification . . . is a departure from the objective truth of things” (383). As he had done in the 1891 paper, he extends the point to a critique of logic: “logical processes” and language itself “share the profoundly provisional character, the character of irregular limitation and adaptation that pervades the whole physical and animal being of man” (383). And: “syllogism is based on classification . . . all hard logical reasoning tends to imply and is apt to imply a confidence in the objective

reality of classification" (385).⁷⁷ Again, Wells's argument follows closely upon Schiller's line of thinking: in his Preface for *Humanism* Schiller called for a "reform of logic" which he finds "hitherto has attempted to be a pseudo-science of a non-existent and impossible process called pure thought," requiring its practitioners "to expunge from our thinking every trace of feeling, interest, desire, and emotion" (x).⁷⁸ Wells's emphasis on the relationship between individual personality and modes of thought is remarkably similar to tendencies in Schiller, who in *Personal Idealism* claimed that "the whole history of philosophy shows that the fit of a man's philosophy is (and should be) as individual as the fit of his clothes" ("Axioms" 50).⁷⁹ Wells repeats the claim, alluding to Molière's "bourgeois gentleman" who, with the help of a philosopher, discovers that he has been talking prose all his life without knowing it:

For my own part, what I understand by Metaphysics and Philosophy is something nearer than breathing and closer than hands and feet, something in its last essential incurably personal, implicit sometimes and as unsuspected as Monsieur Jourdain's power of prose, and made explicit by clear-headed self-examination, something common to all men as far as, and no further than, their individualities have things in common. ("Scepticism" 380–81)

This is a claim for the direct relationship between modes of thought and modes of living, and it leads to Wells's statement that "one's philosophical belief should be merely one's own more or less thoroughly explored mental basis more or less thoroughly mapped and *the statement of the systematised attitude of one's individuality to thought and things in general*" (381). Schiller, too,

⁷⁷ Similar premises and conclusions appear in the earlier paper, where Wells had started with the claim: "*All being is unique*, or, nothing is strictly like anything else," citing "[t]he work of Darwin and Wallace" as a "clear assertion of the uniqueness of living things," and drawing (perhaps ironically) "logical consequences" including critiques of the common noun, of number, and "of the absurdity of being strictly logical" ("Rediscovery" 106, 108–09, 111).

⁷⁸ Slosson notes coincidences between Wells's and Schiller's attacks on formal logic, "attacks of modernism," as Slosson calls them, "such attacks as from without the ramparts as Wells's essay and from within as F. C. S. Schiller's big volume, 'Formal Logic'" (111). The similarity is more one of spirit than letter: Schiller did not attack syllogism on Wells's neo-nominalist grounds but defined it as a paradoxical form of reasoning. See his "Logic versus Life," *Independent* (NY) 75 (1912): 375–78, and his book *Formal Logic* (also 1912), e.g. 185–86 and 194–98.

⁷⁹ "It behoves the true philosopher, therefore, to be tolerant, and to recognise that so long as men *are* different, their metaphysics *must be* different, and that even so, nay for this very reason, any philosophy is better than none at all" ("Axioms" 51). The emphasis on tolerance is somewhat at odds with what Wells would experience among the sociological cohort: see the previous section in this chapter. The claim of individuality in philosophy is a point Schiller would repeat in a preface written for the 1910 republication of his first book, *Riddles of the Sphinx*. There he pointed out that the "proposed aim of metaphysics . . . to synthesize all knowledge . . . renders it intensely personal" because it "cannot forbear to include also the data which consist in the idiosyncrasy of the philosopher who attempts the synthesis. . . . Practically, therefore, a system of metaphysics, with whatever pretensions to pure thought and absolute rationality it may start, is always in the end one man's personal vision about the universe" (vii). Typically unacknowledged mundane implications of the "lofty ambition" of metaphysics, these "data" of personality, were for Schiller "more potent the less the philosopher himself is conscious of his agency" (*Riddles* vii).

employed the trope, referring in *Humanism* to an essay from 1892 in which he had advanced Pragmatist arguments without realising he was a Pragmatist at the time: “little but the name was lacking to my own advocacy of an essentially cognate position. . . . I had all along been a pragmatist myself without knowing it” (ix).⁸⁰ Wells’s own reference to his earlier philosophical outing in “The Rediscovery of the Unique” adopts the same kind of gesture. Rhetorically self-critical, he describes the earlier effort as “bad and even annoying . . . in manner” and “expression,” lacking all sense of a relationship to “a whole literature upon the antagonism of the one and the many, of the specific ideal and the individual reality . . . already in existence”; he further notes that “until I was well over twenty” and before he had discovered “the subjective or introverted element in my being,” he “was a Positivist without knowing it,” a position he says he has since abandoned (“Scepticism” 381, 383).

The arguments Wells presents in “Scepticism” anticipate almost point for point his critique of scientific method applied to sociological analysis in the later paper on “The So-Called Science of Sociology.”⁸¹ There his argument that “in the common acceptance of the word ‘science,’ the subject is not a science at all” sets out the premises that “the uniqueness of beings is the objective truth,” that “scientific method is the method of ignoring individualities,” and that the unit of sociological study is “Being,” conceived as the totality of human history and social experience; his conclusion is that methods for comprehending society so conceived “must partake as much of the nature of art as of science. . . . [S]ociology must be neither art simply, nor science in the narrow meaning of the word, but knowledge rendered through personality, that is to say, in the highest sense of the term, literature” (21, 27, 28, 31–32).⁸² What is absent in the Oxford lecture is the explicit nomination of Utopian

⁸⁰ The essay was entitled “Reality and ‘Idealism’” and appeared in the *Philosophical Review* 1 (1893): 535–46. Slosson, who knew Wells and Schiller and discusses their place in early twentieth-century intellectual life in his book *Six Major Prophets* (1917), combines elements of both Wells’s and Schiller’s formulations of the trope, noting that after “a long chase” to discover what Pragmatism was “I soon discovered that I had been a pragmatist all my life without knowing it. I was as delighted as M. Jourdain when he was told that he had been unconsciously talking prose all his life” (190).

⁸¹ “The So-Called Science of Sociology” presents Wells’s critique of Positivism or, at least, his claim that sociology, because it must be concerned with the relationship between the individual and social “Being,” is necessarily an exception to the grand “classification of the sciences” formulated by the positivist and sociologist Auguste Comte (22).

⁸² With the benefit of hindsight, a reader can find the argument implied in a passage of a letter to Bennett in which Wells rejects his friend’s no doubt well-intentioned attempt to suggest some precedents as literary standards. “You not only cannot but you must not attempt to make a criticism by instituting comparisons or prescribing canons. . . . For my own part I am a purblind laborious intelligence exploring that cell of Being called Wells and I resent your Balzac” (Wilson 47).

fiction as the basis for sociological study. But the justification for Wells's claim that "the creation of Utopias—and their exhaustive criticism—is the proper and distinctive method of sociology" is that "individual intelligences are individual, and each is a little differently placed" in relation to "Being" (31, 34). This claim is the extension of Wells's assertion that philosophy is "personal," a matter of the mental relation between "one's individuality" and "things in general" ("Scepticism" 381).

Furthermore, the Oxford lecture does propose a role for art in knowledge, and contradicts, in a more explicit manner than the novel-as-experiment metaphor in *Mankind in the Making*, the preference for logical inductive generalisation in *Anticipations* and "The Discovery of the Future." Reiterating Schiller's claim that the entire field of human activity, including art, is relative to human purpose, Wells claims there are no grounds for assuming ethical postulates have greater universal purchase than art has (Schiller, "Axioms" 56). "I put faith and standards and rules of conduct upon exactly the same level as I put my belief in what is right in art," he declares, affirming the corollary that what may appear "very distinct imperatives" for Wells are not imperative upon anyone else (Wells, "Scepticism" 391). "One's political proceedings, one's moral acts are, I hold, just as much self-expression as one's poetry or painting or music"; moral and religious propositions have no "universal validity," bringing "ethical, social and religious teaching into the province of poetry," helping "to correct the estrangement between knowledge and beauty that is a feature of so much mental existence at this time" (392). He had propounded a similar kind of moral relativism in *Mankind in the Making*. There, in an early passage combining, as in his Oxford lecture, an evolutionary perspective on the provisional and experimental nature of life with the rejection of moral absolutes, he had posed as the "central conception" of New Republicanism the intention to begin "with a way of looking at life" (the phrase anticipates his defence of the novel almost three hundred pages later) and "to reject and set aside all abstract, refined, and intellectualized ideas as starting propositions, such ideas as Right, Liberty, Happiness, Duty or Beauty, and to hold fast to the assertion of the fundamental nature of life as a tissue and succession of births" (8). He goes on to develop this conception of life as "an unprecedented experiment" and its ethical implications with the characteristic imagery of moral disorientation: "Things that seemed permanent and final, become unsettled and provisional. . . . Everywhere the old direction posts, the old guiding marks, have got out of line and askew" (18–19). The New Republic is Wells's attempt to engage with the "conflict" between traditional and dogmatic assumptions about social organization on one hand, and the

sceptical view that commences from the premise that the old “direction posts” and “guiding marks” are of no use for future navigation, on the other (19).⁸³ In *Mankind in the Making* Wells defends the novel as a means of experimenting with the socio-moral ideas that will comprise social forms of the future.

What conclusions may be drawn from the evidence presented above of the relationship between Wells and Schiller? One is that Hynes’s claim that the lecture represents “nothing more than a pseudo-philosophical basis for anarchy” is reductive in the extreme (Hynes 104). The priority Wells places on individual experience and the moral relativism he deduces are no more anarchic than the refutation, which he shares with Schiller, of formal logic in preference for an emphasis on human purpose. I argue in Chapter 3 that Wells’s preference for the individual instance over general rules arises not only in “The Rediscovery of the Unique,” as well as the conception of the novel he formulates in his reviewing for the *Saturday*, but in Wells’s general theory of social evolution.

The conclusion of greater immediate relevance is that the basis for Wells’s defence of the novel as an exploration of the relationship between individual personality and social forces arises not in the context of his sociological interventions, but eighteen months earlier in response to the invitation to speak before the Oxford Philosophical Society. It is in the Oxford lecture that Wells first explicitly revives the position originally outlined in “The Rediscovery of the Unique,” which informs his conception of the relationship between individual personalities and perspectives and general thought and society, and further forms the basis of his methodological proposals in “The So-Called Science of Sociology” and his mature conception of the novel in “The Contemporary Novel.” The Oxford lecture makes explicit Wells’s abandonment of the methodological dualism of *Anticipations* and “The Discovery of the Future,” and articulates for the first time after 1901 his conception that the relationship between individual circumstances and human life in the broadest terms, a socio-historical, mental, and evolutionary totality, is fundamental to knowledge. (Ironically, it is a

⁸³ Similarly in *Anticipations*, where Wells proposes the ethical system of his New Republic engage with social “deliquescence”: the “determining frame” of ethics in the New Republic is to comprise the ideals of the “future world state to which all things are pointing,” an ethical system that will be “reconstructed in the light of modern science,” not traditional or dogmatic beliefs (*Anticipations* 296–97). I discuss Wells’s metaphorical exposition of contemporary moral problems—developed in *Anticipations*, “Discovery of the Future,” “The Contemporary Novel,” and his autobiographical “Digression About Novels” in terms of “deliquescence,” “floating uncertainty,” and the “splintering frame” of “social fixity”—above, pp. 79–80.

paper outlining a sceptical argument on the nature of human thought in which Wells retracts his scepticism about the possibility of a constructive contribution in art.) I suggest the preparatory reading Wells undertook while composing the Oxford lecture provoked him into this assertion. True enough, Wells's extension of the claim of individualities into a defence of the novel as an experiment in life, in *Mankind in the Making*, shows that he was already thinking generally in this direction. But *Mankind* not only made Wells attractive to the Oxford Philosophical Society as a visiting lecturer, it made the essays in *Personal Idealism* more germane to his own thought. It is significant that Wells explicitly joins up his thinking in "Scepticism" with his earlier position. For despite the derogative attitude toward his own craft in *Anticipations*, there is an overall continuity in Wells's approach. I show in the following chapter that the sceptical attitude issuing in the endorsement of inductive methods in matters of sociological analysis, at the expense of fictional methods, arose not in the conviction that literary and intellectual responses to experience are of different kinds, but that contemporary literature was shirking its social obligations.⁸⁴ In other words, the dualism of *Anticipations* should be read as a critique of the state of the art, not as a statement of the essential limitations of the literary imagination. Nevertheless, *pace* West, *Anticipations* does not mark the point where Wells once and for all betrays his imagination in favour of social ideals.⁸⁵ For one thing, it is clearly not his final statement on the matter: he resolves the dualism of *Anticipations* in *Mankind in the Making*, "Scepticism of the Instrument," and "The So-Called Science of Sociology," favouring the synthetic approach that characterises his thoughts on the functions of literature generally. The preponderance of evidence, at least as far as his explicit articulation of his views on these functions extends, falls on Wells's side, not West's. For another, there are no substantive grounds for distinguishing between the defence of the imagination in Wells's attempt "to correct the estrangement between knowledge and beauty" in "Scepticism" and his attempt to assimilate aesthetic and social objectives for the novel in his reviewing practice before the turn of the century ("Scepticism" 392). And, with tongue in cheek, one might point out anyway that the methodological dualism shows that Wells *was* capable of differentiating between social and artistic objectives.

Another point is that the methodological dualism of *Anticipations* and "The Discovery of the Future" was likely the result of Wells's misapprehension that to be sociological he had to

⁸⁴ See Chapter 3, pp. 147–48 below.

⁸⁵ See the thesis Introduction, pp. 4–5 above, for my discussion of West's argument, and the watershed consensus in Wells criticism more generally. See also the thesis Conclusions, p. 178 below.

adopt the scientific pretensions of contemporary sociology. The chronological relationship between Wells's dualistic arguments and other features of his thought suggests as much. As I explore in Chapter 3, the conception of the novel that Wells develops in his reviewing for the *Saturday* (1895–97) is at odds with the dualism of *Anticipations*. And once Wells is in a position to engage critically with contemporary sociology—he is not in this position until after the formation of the London Sociological Society and the inaugural publication of its *Papers*, which provided the opportunity for his critical reflections in “The So-Called Science of Sociology”—he immediately reasserts the relation between individual personalities or mental attitudes and social contexts that is the characteristic feature of his *Saturday* reviewing and his mature conception of social objectives in the novel.

To conclude this chapter, I note also the possibility that Wells's affinity with the kinds of progressive philosophizing going on at Oxford may not alone have provided sufficient grounds for his revival of the earlier arguments. For his claim that morals, religion, and poetry inhabit the same plane of common human experience and the implication that art is as crucial to comprehending and intervening in experience as philosophy, or any other method for feeling out the textures of human experience, may be read as a direct response to Henry Sturt's contribution to the volume: Wells's rejoinder to Sturt's attempt to subordinate art to the study of ethics and epistemology is, I suggest, one example of the “joggling” of the Oxford philosophers Wells alludes to in his letter to Henry Newbolt.⁸⁶ In an essay entitled “Art and Personality,” in which he defined art “as self-expression,” Sturt claimed art exists in a subordinate relation to morals and knowledge (310). “Art lies outside the vital needs of our existence,” Sturt writes; it is “episodic in a way that morality and knowledge can never be,” by which he means that art abstracts from life, is self-contained and discontinuous, and does not refer directly to the “continuous and extensive” system comprising individual moral judgment and knowledge (314). As well as expressing his affinity with Schiller's position, Wells's claim that morals, philosophy, politics, and art are all forms of “self-expression” restores to art a fundamental role in the relationship between thought and forms of social organization denied by Sturt: in Sturt, Wells was confronted with the same kind of subordination of art that he had attempted himself in *Anticipations*.

Intriguingly, Sturt repeats practically verbatim some of the conclusions about art Wells

⁸⁶ See p. 96 above.

had drawn during his tenure as fiction reviewer for the *Saturday*. Sturt finds that “[t]o enter upon an artistic task in a spirit of moral zeal generally impairs the artistic result” and that “novels with a moral purpose are generally bad fiction without being good sermons” (Sturt 321). One might compare Wells’s rejection of the “novelette with a purpose,” his objection to the abandonment of artistic objectives in favour of moral lectures, to “preaching” doctrine instead of writing novels, and his complaint that the reading public demands “a hybrid product, half art and half sermon” (Wells, “Woman Who Did” 319; “Fiction [VIII]” 321). And Sturt’s claim that what is of “value in the work of art is the consciousness of the artist manifested therein” recalls Wells’s claim that “all written matter is directly or indirectly personal” and his preference for originality in style and the clear expression of an artist’s “temperament” (Sturt 322; Wells, “Mr. Zangwill’s Egoism” 17; “Secrets of the Short Story” 693).⁸⁷ It is to Wells’s reviewing for the *Saturday* that I turn in the next chapter, where I consider in detail his defence of the novel in terms of the relationship between personality and character, between narrative perspective and social objectives in the novel, a position that provided the grounding for the defence of art as a form of sociological speculation explored in this chapter, and ultimately comprised the terms of Wells’s mature conception of the novel in “The Contemporary Novel.”

⁸⁷ See Chapter 3, pp. 115–17 below for discussion.

3

Certain Critical Opinions: The Origins and Evolution of Wells's Social–Aesthetic Synthesis

So far I have examined Wells's debate with Henry James over objectives and principles in the novel, issuing in Wells's argument, in his 1911 essay on "The Contemporary Novel," for free rein with methods and subject matter and the integration of aesthetic and social matters in art, as well as the development in Wells's earlier position, between 1901 and 1905, from his rejection in *Anticipations* of fiction as a means of social analysis, to arguments in "Scepticism of the Instrument" and "The So-Called Science of Sociology" for the use of art to guide philosophical and sociological inquiry. Throughout, my argument has been that social efficacy, the idea that the novel is capable of social analysis and constructive critique and may even influence forms of social organization, is consistently the overriding evaluative criterion in Wells's conception of the novel. I have characterised as "cognitive" and "socially constructive" his defence of the novel as a means of engaging critically and creatively with ideas, and shown that he consistently attempts to assimilate aesthetic criteria to his demand for social efficacy in art. I argued that although Wells rejects fiction as a means of social analysis in *Anticipations*, he resolves the conflict between sociology and fiction in favour of the latter by defining social experience itself as well as thought in general and the development of socio-moral ideals, in terms of a relation between individuals and social forces. In this chapter, I explore the origins of Wells's synthesis of aesthetic and social values in his review criticism, written over a roughly two-year period between March 1895 and April 1897, when he was head fiction reviewer for the London *Saturday Review*.¹ Responding to the consensus view in existing criticism, that Wells adopted a conception of the novel at the start of his career that later declined to a utilitarian, functional, even anti-artistic attitude, I show that, from the start, Wells was committed to the attempt to integrate aesthetic and social values. This calls into question Ray's view in particular, that the reviews represent a conception of

¹ Preferring the body of work composed for the *Saturday* for its emphasis specifically upon fiction and the criticism of fiction, I do not deal with the drama reviews Wells wrote for the *Pall Mall Gazette*, where he was drama critic between January and May 1895. A survey and discussion of the latter can be found in Parrinder and Philmus 19–47.

the “novel proper,” free of the utilitarian preoccupations that derogated Wells’s later productions (Ray, “H. G. Wells Tries” 109).

The primary objective in this chapter is to show that Wells had adopted cognitive, socially constructive views on the novel before the turn of the century, in his earliest writing about fiction, its qualities and objectives. While building on Ray’s identification of Wells’s evaluative preference for the novel of “social issues,” the social-realist novel or “novel of types,” as Wells terms it in a significant review on Turgenev, my discussion calls into question the views of West, Bergonzi, and Ray that Wells betrayed his imagination after the turn of the century in favour of the utilitarian attitude (Ray, “H. G. Wells Tries” 118; Wells, “Novel of Types” 24).² In previous chapters I have shown that the notion of a betrayal (Lodge’s term, summarising the earlier findings) is misleading, for Wells never attempts to abandon the concept of imagination when it comes to fiction, seeking instead a resolution between imaginative and intellectual, creative and analytical, poetic and scientific approaches to understanding human experience—an attempt “to correct the estrangement between knowledge and beauty,” to use his own phrase (Wells, “Scepticism” 392; Lodge, “Assessing” 56). In this chapter I show that the dilemma between artistic expression and social analysis, the same dilemma that Wells attempts to resolve in “Scepticism of the Instrument” by claiming all forms of thought are poetic, or in “The So-Called Science of Sociology” by defining literature as “knowledge rendered through personality,” or in “The Contemporary Novel” by demanding a free rein with methods and subject matter in the interests of social critique in the novel, characterises the conception of art Wells develops in his reviewing for the *Saturday*, too (“Scepticism” 392; “So-Called Science” 32; “Contemporary Novel” 872).³ In his preference for social realism of the kind he encounters in Turgenev, Wells attempts to assimilate artistic techniques and social analysis in fiction. I also show that despite the fact that the conception of the novel he develops in the *Saturday* assumes the possibility of social analysis in fiction, by the end of his tenure as reviewer Wells adopts the sceptical attitude toward the possibility of social efficacy that would develop into an outright rejection, in *Anticipations*, of fiction as a means of social analysis. In short, the view that Wells adopts some pure conception of “the novel proper” in his reviewing from which he later declines to a

² Ray finds “[t]he conception of the novel Wells evolved for himself through his *Saturday* reviewing was solid and creditable, but with the important exception of his insistence on representing great social issues through individual histories, thoroughly traditional” (118).

³ See Introduction, pp. 1–5 for a discussion.

more utilitarian position is misleading and must be reassessed.

Beginning with a reading of Wells's prescription for critics in an article in the *Saturday* outlining "Certain Critical Opinions," I show that existing commentary overlooks the significance of his remark that critics should emulate the procedures of E. A. Poe, and suggest his advice to critics be read as a call to attend to the relation between novelistic technique and the social objectives and implications of fiction.⁴ I examine the relationship between Wells's and Poe's critical procedures, arguing that in his reviews, Wells extends Poe's concept of "unity of effect" to a defence of social realism of the kind Wells encounters in the social novel or "novel of types." For Poe, unity of effect is a touchstone for a work's structural and aesthetic coherence, and he denies unity to the novel, as well as any prose longer than the short story and any poetic work of more than one hundred lines or so. Part of Wells's unique contribution in his reviewing is therefore his attempt to defend social realism in the novel by extending Poe's concept of unity, by which he justifies the use of certain types of narrative perspective in the novel. This forms Wells's technical rationale for his preference for social realism in the novel.

In a subsequent section I examine Wells's articles on "Human Evolution" and "Morals and Civilisation," written for the *Fortnightly Review* during his tenure at the *Saturday*. Here Wells argues that the evolution of society is an intellectual matter and that the role of the artist is to direct cultural evolution by promulgating and interrogating socio-moral ideas. The articles are directly relevant to the conception of the novel worked out in the *Saturday* because they help explain why Wells prefers the social novel over other forms. The evolutionary framework provides a cognitive rationale for Wells's critical preferences while making explicit the utilitarian or functional quality of his conception, revealing the ultimate criterion for artistic value to be one of social efficacy. One encounters the characteristic limitations of Wells's approach by comparing the cognitive rationale for social ends in art, outlined in the *Fortnightly* articles, with the technical rationale Wells develops in the *Saturday* reveals. For one thing, Wells makes no attempt to explore mechanisms by which works might actually achieve the kinds of social effects he proposes, a shortcoming in formulation that issues in his reviews

⁴ The existing scholarship on Wells's reviewing for the *Saturday* is represented by Gordon Ray's "H. G. Wells Tries to be a Novelist" (1960) and "H. G. Wells's Contributions to the *Saturday Review*" (1961), Robert Philmus's "H. G. Wells as Literary Critic for the *Saturday Review*" (1977), and Patrick Parrinder and Robert Philmus's *H. G. Wells's Literary Criticism* (1980), a selection of his writing on drama and fiction including reviews reprinted from the *Saturday* with extensive commentary.

in metaphorical statements of such effects where he reaches positive conclusions on books or, where he reaches negative findings, erasing a work's specificity entirely and reducing it to a kind of conduit for doctrine or argument, a reduction Wells censured in novelists themselves.⁵ Furthermore, in contrast to his defence of the novel of types as a form of critical engagement with social ideas, Wells adopts a sceptical attitude toward the potential of literature to execute its critical, analytical social functions, which in itself casts doubt on the claim that his conception of the novel at this time is free of utilitarian preoccupations. I conclude by suggesting that the limitations inherent in Wells's theory of social efficacy in art establish the conditions for his rejection of fiction as a form of social analysis in *Anticipations*, and his subsequent attempts to resolve the dilemma over imaginative and sociological modes of writing. Reading Wells's reviewing alongside the *Fortnightly* articles is crucial to comprehending this phase of his development, because after 1897 the role of the novel in relation to society defines all of his writing on art; it is in his attempt to provide an explanatory framework for his own critical preferences that the dilemma between "beauty" and "knowledge" first arises for Wells.

Certain Critical Opinions

Wells makes few direct statements about the role of the literary critic in his two-year tenure as fiction reviewer for the *Saturday*, but from the start his opinions on contemporary practice are critical. He opens a column on "Readers in General," written in his first month, with the observation that "[l]iterary criticism is overmuch given to ignoring the reader," describing as "academic" an approach to works that ignores the broader context of artistic production and reception, in Wells's view amounting to "a fault that needs correction," even a "vice" ("Of Readers" 410). A year later he is found complaining that criticism has reneged on standards and declined into puffery calculated to swell the sales of otherwise mediocre books: "criticism declines and puffery increases" while "the panegyrist" remains "better paid than the critic" ("Popular Writers" 145). But it is an article expressing "Certain Critical Opinions," printed in the *Saturday* for 11 July 1896, about two-thirds of the way through Wells's tenure, in which he makes his most sustained statement, brief nonetheless, of his preferences in literary criticism.⁶ It is a polemical piece in which Wells responds to the

⁵ But see Chapter 4 of this study for a discussion of such mechanisms in Wells's own fiction.

⁶ Hammond describes the piece as Wells's "earliest sustained attempt to define his critical position" (*H. G. Wells and the Modern Novel* 25). Philmus says the piece explains how Wells saw "the primary function of the critic" and Ray quotes it as evidence of the originality of Wells's critical procedure "for his time"

Scottish anthropologist, historian, and professional critic Andrew Lang (1844–1912), who had attacked an *Athenaeum* review of R. L. Stevenson’s posthumously published and unfinished romance, *Weir of Hermiston* (1896).⁷ The circumstances (Lang ridiculed the *Athenaeum* reviewer for complaining about the use of Scots dialect, for which Chatto & Windus had compiled a glossary of around two hundred words) provoke Wells into a rare and tantalising statement of his views about the critic’s task; he issues procedural advice to critics and suggests they follow the example not of Lang, but of Poe.

Wells commences with the wit that is a feature of his reviewing style, describing *Longman’s Magazine*, the London monthly for which Lang wrote a popular column, as obscure (Wells, “Certain Critical Opinions” 32).⁸ Acknowledging his mastery of “apt, entertaining allusion, knowledge, extensive reading,” Wells diagnoses Lang with “a kind of lawyer’s knowledge of literary precedent” (32).⁹ He proceeds to attack “the peculiar standpoint of the Academic

(Philmus, “H. G. Wells as Literary Critic” 167; Ray, “H. G. Wells Tries” 111). See pp. 117–18, 177 below for my assessment of the originality of Wells’s position.

⁷ Lang was a respected writer and critic who “regularly wrote reviews and other contributions for a wide range of periodicals including the *Saturday Review*, the *Morning Post*, the *Illustrated London News*, *Blackwood’s*, *The Academy*, and *Punch*. His monthly column, ‘At the Sign of the Ship’, which appeared in *Longman’s Magazine* from January 1886 to October 1905, became a national institution” (Donaldson 453); Green says the column “contains the largest body of Lang’s pronouncements on current literature” (166). Ray quotes a letter to Wells from W. E. Henley, a friend of Stevenson and editor of *New Review* when Wells’s *Time Machine* was published, in which Henley suggests that a hostile *Times* review of Wells’s *The Wonderful Visit* (1895) was probably Lang’s work, raising the possibility of personal animus in “Certain Critical Opinions” (“H. G. Wells’s Contributions” 31). Wells did find a place for Lang’s scholarly zeal for minutiae, if not in a book review: in *Anticipations* he imagines a critical edition of Frazer’s *Golden Bough*, fastidiously annotated by Lang, as an example of the intellectualised controversy he felt was lacking in public discourse of the day (273). Wells may have been influenced by Lang’s favourable finding on his latest novel: Green quotes Lang (“At the Sign of the Ship” September 1900) “ventur[ing] to hope that many people will be no less entertained than myself by *Love and Mr. Lewisham*” (qtd. in Green 167–68). Wells added Lang’s *Social Origins* (1903) to a list of sociological works cited favourably in the 1914 reprinting of “The So-Called Science of Sociology” (*Englishman* 203). He is less accommodating in the reviews. Reading Lang’s historical novel *A Monk of Fife* (1895) Wells endows Lang with “a crippled imagination”; reviewing a book of short stories for which Lang had supplied a verse introduction, Wells doubts that Lang “really read these stories” (“Fiction [XIV]” 209; “Mr. S. R. Crockett’s Latest” 513). The piece by Lang to which Wells responds in “Certain Critical Opinions” is in *Longman’s* for July 1896, where Lang had written, “according to a certain kind of reviewer, Scotch novelists should not write Scotch. . . . The words—the two hundred Scotch words used by Mr. Stevenson—are of constant occurrence in Burns, Scott, and the Ballads. . . . A critic ought to be enough of a philologist to comprehend them, especially by aid of the context. . . . Nobody seems to be perplexed but learned newspaper critics” (“At the Sign” 320–21). The anonymous review on Stevenson is in the *Athenaeum* for 23 May 1896, p. 673.

⁸ Donaldson describes Lang’s column as “a national institution” (453). Philmus identifies wit as one of Wells’s “basic desiderata” (“H. G. Wells as Literary Critic” 168). Ray notes the “ironical and sometimes hilarious commentary” in Wells’s reviews (“H. G. Wells Tries” 112).

⁹ The phrase anticipates the distinction in Wells’s “The Discovery of the Future” (1902) between the “creative” type of mind and “the legal or submissive type . . . constantly refer[ring] to the law made, the right established, the precedent set, and most consistently ignor[ing] or condemn[ing] the thing

school,” represented here by Lang, and its critical “system” (32). Wells make two observations (they are really objections) about the academic system. He describes its standard practice as one in which critics derive aesthetic principles from “the entire works, good and bad together, of a series of men now dead” (32). A secondary charge is that academic critics indulge in a kind of literary stamp-collecting, lifting “passages of peculiar merit” from this “canon of excellence” to learn “by rote for purposes of allusion and quotation” and as benchmarks to establish whether new books “follow the canonical books” or may instead be dismissed as a kind of “heresy” (32–33). Wells suggests the result of such procedure, approaching works with a combination of biographical and other extrinsic data and criteria, is a failure to elucidate the individual characteristics of the work under review, though his indictment is perhaps tonally uneven, describing the resulting “erudite discourse” as “trivial” at the same time he accuses it, in a memorable trope, of imposing the oppressive “dead hand of an accomplished literature” (33).¹⁰ In contrast, Wells recommends the critic—whom he expects to have made a serious assay at imaginative writing himself and to arrive at criticism “an expert at technique,” familiar with “the various standpoints, the various aims” of fiction, endowed with “a powerful imagination,” in short a kind of critic-artist—adopt the following procedure: “to appreciate essentials, to understand the bearing of structural expedients upon design, to get at an author through his workmanship, to analyse a work as though it stood alone in the world, save where plagiarism is concerned, after the fashion of Poe” (33).

There are three elements in this prescription for critics. Wells appears to be making

that is only seeking to establish itself” (“Discovery” 326). Note, too, the similarity between Wells’s claim in “Certain Critical Opinions” that the difference between Lang’s “Academic” assumptions and the kind of criticism a man with artistic experience might perform is akin to “the perpetual conflict between pedant and maker, between past and future, the Chinese and English, of the intellectual world,” and remarks in “Discovery” that the active, creative, forward-looking mind “is the mind more manifest among the western nations” while the mind that submits to the past “is the mind of the oriental” (“Certain Critical Opinions” 33; “Discovery” 326). See Chapter 2, pp. 74–81 for a discussion of “Discovery” and how it relates to Wells’s conception of art.

¹⁰ In a later review detecting in a new work by Stephen Crane the “use in narrative of sustained descriptions of the mental states of his characters” characteristic of Tolstoy, Wells dismisses as “amiable fatuities” Lang’s attempts at criticism while finding that American critics are not so poorly endowed as their English counterparts: “the academic habit of criticizing deductively from admitted classics [is] less conspicuous in the intellectual life of the States” (“New American Novelists” 262–63). Wells publicised his objections to academic practices before the article on “Certain Critical Opinions.” In a long letter to the editor of the *Saturday Review*, published in the issue for 14 December 1895 under the heading “The Threatened University” he admits “[s]cholarship is an admirable thing in its way, but the greater need of science and literature alike is energy and originality,” adding, “the finest scholar in the world is but a parasite on originality” (D. Smith, *Correspondence* 1:253). For the published copy see *Saturday Review* 80 (1895): 803–04.

recommendations about form (“to understand . . . structural expedients upon design”) and style (“get at an author through his workmanship”); most tantalisingly, he says the critic is to approach the work as something standing “alone in the world,” and adds the qualifying phrase invoking Poe. Although both of the existing critical examinations of Wells’s *Saturday* reviewing—Gordon Ray’s “H. G. Wells Tries to be a Novelist” (1959) and Robert Philmus’s “H. G. Wells as Literary Critic for the *Saturday Review*” (1977)—quote this passage as the basis for substantive claims about Wells’s conception of art, neither accounts for the qualifying phrase.¹¹ Both Ray and Philmus quote the passage from “Certain Critical Opinions” up to and including the phrase on analysing a work “as though it stood alone in the world,” but suppress the reference to Poe, thereby overlooking Wells’s debt to Poe as a literary reviewer and critic (“Certain Critical Opinions” 33).¹² In contrast to these readings, I argue that Wells’s advice to critics, and the conception of the novel he develops in the reviews for the *Saturday* more generally, cannot properly be comprehended without reflecting on what he means by approaching a work “after the fashion of Poe.” For Wells, like Poe, held technique to subserve an overall “unity of effect”; he extended Poe’s criterion of unity in the short story and poem, worked out in detail in Poe’s essays on “The Philosophy of Composition” (1846) and “The Poetic Principle” (1850), to the literary form Poe denied unity, the novel. As well as clarifying Wells’s meaning in “Certain Critical Opinions” and his conceptual debt to Poe, examining the relationship helps reveal what is original in Wells’s contribution and, ultimately, the characteristic limitations of his approach.

Philmus treats the passage as evidence of a pervasive advocacy in Wells’s reviews for stylistic individualism in preference to adhering to “rules” or “laws” of composition, reading the prescription for critics in “Certain Critical Opinions” as an expression of Wells’s “paramount literary value” of “uniqueness,” which Philmus traces back to Wells’s early *Fortnightly Review* essay on “The Rediscovery of the Unique” (“H. G. Wells as Literary Critic” 167–68, 170, 174 note 11).¹³ Aside from Wells’s rejection of the “Academic” approach to criticism, represented by Lang in “Certain Critical Opinions,” where Wells rejects the evaluation of works based on canonical preferences, there is sound evidence for this

¹¹ Discussion of Wells’s *Saturday* reviewing in Parrinder and Philmus repeats the argument in Philmus.

¹² Philmus notes that Wells “congratulates [Poe] unstintingly” in reviews but neither Ray nor Philmus, nor Parrinder and Philmus, quotes the paragraph in question beyond the phrase “alone in the world”: see Ray 111; Philmus 167, 172; Parrinder and Philmus 7.

¹³ See Chapter 2, pp. 84–85, 101–03 for my discussion of Wells’s essay. Parrinder and Philmus reprise Philmus’s interpretation of “Certain Critical Opinions”: see Parrinder and Philmus 7.

interpretation. Wells's clearest rejection of the notion that an artist adhere to rules of composition occurs in a review, which Philmus quotes, of a volume on *How to Write Fiction* (1895). There Wells scorns the book's anonymous author (whom Raknem identifies as Sherwin Cody) for using the stories of Maupassant "as King Og used his bed, as the standard for short story of any description," because every author "worth reading is a law unto himself" and "[t]here are no rules for the greater factors," by which Wells means factors greater than "the deliberate factor," preferring those "innate" in an author, qualities of "temperament" or personal character ("Secrets of the Short Story" 693; part qtd. in Philmus, "H. G. Wells as Literary Critic" 167).¹⁴ He assumed that "all written matter is directly or indirectly personal" and rejected books and artistic methodologies (especially certain forms of realism, especially Gissing's realism) where they suppressed an author's "personality" or exhibited "undistinguished" style or a writer yet to find his "distinctive method of expression" ("Mr. Zangwill's Egoism" 17; "Fiction [XV]" 405; "New American Novelists" 263; "Dull, But Probable" 65).¹⁵ He approves of a novel by the Irish-Australian author Kathleen Mannington Caffyn for its expression of her "individuality and genuine first-hand view of things" ("Fiction [VIII]" 321). And being unoriginal or imitative provokes Wells's sarcastic censure. On a minor romance by Mrs. Egerton Eastwick (Pleydell North): "There is Wilkie Collins at his best—tolerable reading; and there is Wilkie Collins imitating Wilkie Collins—sorry work, demanding forgiveness and earning forgetfulness; but Mrs. Eastwick imitating Wilkie Collins is quite unforgivable" ("Fiction [IV]" 838). Wells introduces a review of a

¹⁴ The allusion to "King Og" is a mistake, which Wells repeats in the original text of "The Discovery of the Future," where he writes: "Literature is for the most part history or history at one remove, and what is culture but a mould of interpretation into which new things are thrust, a collection of standards, a sort of bed of King Og, to which all new expressions must be lopped or stretched?" ("Discovery" 327). Wells emended "King Og" to "Procrustes" in a reprint: see Chapter 2, note 32 above for details. Raknem 354–59 examines the influence of Maupassant on Wells's artistic practice. MacKenzie and MacKenzie claim Wells had no scruple against "using a plot from Poe or [French science-fiction author Nicolas Camille] Flammarion" and that Wells "candidly confessed that he had learned to write by imitation when he was at the Normal School, at Holt and Up Park, and when he began to compose at a great pace after 1894 there was no good reason for him to scrutinise what he wrote to assess his indebtedness to Poe, Maupassant, or contemporaries from whom he borrowed plots and ideas" (*Time Traveller* 119). Not realising Wells had ridiculed *How to Write Fiction* in a review, Raknem says *How to Write Fiction* "was the very thing Wells needed" when setting out as a short-story author, "and he very probably studied it" (376). See Raknem 379 note 56 for the identification of Cody. Of course constructive influence is one thing, slavish imitation another, and Wells's admiration for the Frenchman or any other writer does not undermine his rejection of literary recipe books. See also David Y. Hughes, "H. G. Wells and the Charge of Plagiarism," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 21 (1966): 85–90, for a rebuttal of Raknem's claim of direct borrowing in Wells's early productions.

¹⁵ See note 19 and pp. 129–32 below for Wells's findings on Gissing's technique.

novel by Arthur Morrison noting “that the rediscovery of *Oliver Twist* is upon us,” decrying imitation as the “pest of reviewers” and the “curse of literature” (“Slum Novel” 573). Other authors offending on grounds of unoriginality include the Dean of Durham, the Rev. J. E. C. Welldon; mystery writer Max Pemberton; Bram Stoker; and Arthur Thomas Quiller-Couch, who would complete the draft of the late R. L. Stevenson’s *St. Ives* (1898) (“Dr. Welldon” 82–83; “Fiction [VII]” 150; “Fiction [XVI]” 436; “Two Novels” 653; M. Smith 640). Philmus’s reading is also compatible with Wells’s later definition of literature, in the original text of “The So-Called Science of Sociology” (1905), as “knowledge rendered through personality,” as well as the demand in “The Contemporary Novel” for free rein in subject matter (“So-Called Science” 32; “Contemporary Novel” 872).¹⁶ But Philmus’s reading does not take into account Wells’s reference to Poe. In the next section I suggest that Wells’s concern with “uniqueness” in the *Saturday* reviews is subordinate to a greater concern, responding to Poe, with defending the novel as capable of a kind of unity of effect, which Wells defines in social-realist terms. Just as “personality” is only one component of the phrase “knowledge rendered through personality,” with neither term alone an adequate definition for “literature,” defining Wells’s critical model in terms of an “axiological” emphasis on personality, as does Philmus, fails to account for Wells’s attempt to assimilate technique and theme, and his emphasis on fiction’s cognitive role in relation to social progress (“H. G. Wells as Literary Critic” 168).

Incidentally, Philmus’s emphasis on Wells’s rejection of compositional recipes, while identifying a key component of his approach, does not isolate a uniquely Wellsian trait. Ironically, perhaps even extraordinarily given the consensus in Wells criticism on his opposition to the Jamesian novel, it is Henry James who anticipates Wells’s objection to the kind of compositional rules he rejects in his review on the manual *How to Write Fiction*.¹⁷ Responding to a lecture on “The Art of Fiction” read to an audience at the Royal Institution’s Friday evening lecture for 25 April 1884 (the same forum at which, almost 18

¹⁶ Wells emended the former phrase to “knowledge rendered imaginatively, and with an element of personality” when he delivered the paper on “The So-Called Science” to the London Sociological Society” ([1906] 365). The term “knowledge” suggests that Wells valued literature for its cognitive effect, and I argue later in this chapter that his intellectualisation of artistic effect, his assumption that artistic efficacy is a cognitive matter, causes problems for his critical position. See pp. 137–50 below for my discussion of Wells’s critique of literature on cognitive grounds in two articles printed in the *Fortnightly Review* during his tenure at the *Saturday*, and its relationship to his reviewing practice and conception of art generally.

¹⁷ See Chapter 1, especially pp. 12–53, for my discussion of Wells’s debate with James over the objectives and functions of the novel.

years later, Wells would read “The Discovery of the Future”) by the historian and novelist Walter Besant (1836–1901), James rejected Besant’s claim that all art is “governed and directed by general laws” that “may be laid down and taught” like mathematical or geometrical principles (Besant, *Art of Fiction* 6). In an essay under the same title (also 1884), James rebutted these premised “laws of fiction,” producing the remarkable statement that a novel be held not to traditional rules at all, but to the dictum “that it be interesting” (James, “Art of Fiction” 384). It is the only “general responsibility . . . I can think of,” James writes, sanely opposing to the idea that art be “fenced in by prescription” the principle that it “be perfectly free,” before loosely defining artistic “liberty” as a quality “as various as the temperament of man,” the result of “a personal, a direct impression of life” executed in terms of “intensity” and “tones and resemblances,” discounting the possibility of “a recipe” for art while suggesting that “a sense of reality” irreducible to technique is the essential thing (384–85, 387). These are resonant passages considered alongside Wells’s own later statements that “the essential in literature is temperament,” that “to see life clearly and whole . . . is an ambition permitted only to a man full grown” (I examine this statement in relation to Wells’s preference for certain kinds of narrative perspective in the next section), and that artists be afforded an “absolutely free hand” in choosing material and techniques (“Secrets of the Short Story” 693; “Novels of Gissing” 195; “Contemporary Novel” 872). To identify what is unique in Wells’s critical conception, one must look elsewhere than his emphasis on uniqueness and freedom from legislated rules in technique and the expression of authorial personality.

I propose an interpretation of the crucial passage from “Certain Critical Opinions” that takes into consideration what Wells means when he says his preferred approach proceeds “after the fashion of Poe.” The interpretation offered below suggests that Wells transforms Poe’s analysis of aesthetic objectives into an analysis combining aesthetic and social ends. My comparison of Wells’s and Poe’s critical procedures will show the phrase “as though it stood alone in the world” must be read not as a *prima facie* reference to style or authorial “personality” but as a demand for an assessment of the novel in social-realist terms.

After the fashion of Poe

Critics have documented parallels in subject matter and style between Poe and Wells and even noted lines of direct influence. Bergonzi notes that comparisons with Poe were “customary” in contemporary reviews (*Early H. G. Wells* 123). For example, W. C. Stead’s

early review of *The Time Machine* detected in Wells “an imagination as gruesome as that of Poe” (“New Review” 263). Raknem quotes reviews of Wells’s fiction identifying aspects of Wells’s creative debt to Poe and discusses Wells’s adoption of Poe’s “principles of construction” in short story writing, finding that Poe “influenced Wells’s method of handling the subject-matter, his style and mode of expression, and his attitude towards his readers” (366–79). Raknem claims “Wells was the greater inventive writer, and was nearer to life,” while conceding to Poe the “richer artistic imagination, and greater descriptive powers,” a point that repeats St. Loe Strachey’s estimate, in a review of *The War of the Worlds*, that Poe’s “art was perhaps greater than Mr. Wells’s” while conceding to Wells “a well-cultivated instinct for style” and more believable, less “stiffened” characters (qtd. in Parrinder, ed., *Critical Heritage* 63).¹⁸

The distinction between Wells and Poe in terms of treatment of character is germane to Wells’s own critical preferences in his *Saturday* reviewing, for it is Wells’s attempt to identify a tendency among certain Continental and Russian novelists to present character in relation to social contexts that provides the basis for his own evaluative preferences. In this section I argue that Poe’s central critical concept, “unity of effect,” directly influences Wells’s conception of art and that Wells extends Poe’s concept to the novel, the form to which Poe, who ascribed unity exclusively to short poetic forms and the short story, denied unity. Using Poe’s terminology, Wells claims the novel achieves unity where it explores the effects of social “forces” on characters. Wells’s characteristic contribution is the extension of Poe’s concept of effect to a defence of social realism in the novel, but Wells also maintains a flexible, pluralistic attitude in his reviewing and puts aside his demand for social ends in the novel to acquit books for purely aesthetic reasons, or even for being a good read, that otherwise do not satisfy the social objective.¹⁹

A number of possibilities compete in Wells’s reviewing for identification as the attitudes or principles he has in mind by recommending critics proceed “after the fashion of Poe”

¹⁸ See also Hammond, *H. G. Wells and the Modern Novel* 160–61 for similarities between Poe’s *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* and Wells’s *Mr. Blettsworthy on Rampole Island*. Rainwater, discussing “significant echoes of Poe’s fiction” in a number of early stories and novels by Wells, remarks upon the discrepancy between Poe’s importance to Wells and the amount of critical examination of the relationship (“Encounters” 35).

¹⁹ Philmus has previously noted a “pluralism” in Wells’s “critical standards” and finds Wells, particularly in “his earliest efforts,” to be “deliberately unsystematic” and “the novice in his preference—justified by the unsteady application of vague or ingenuous criteria—for subject over treatment” (“H. G. Wells as Literary Critic” 166–67). I argue that pluralism weakens Wells’s defence of social realism in the novel. See pp. 133–35 for my views on Wells’s “ingenuous criteria.”

(“Certain Critical Opinions” 33). Rejecting the “Academic school” for its adherence to traditional critical dicta, Wells finds in Poe an ally in the battle against canons. He cites “Poe’s treatment of the story of ‘Barnaby Rudge,’” Dickens’s fifth novel serialised in 1841, as a “sort of criticism” which, proceeding by “lucid discussion, analysis, and demonstration” of a work’s “texture and structure,” is “more fundamental” than the Academic approach (33). In a later review of novels by Stephen Crane and Sherwin Cody, Wells would claim that “emancipation from the hampering generalities of the English scholar . . . was the dream of Poe” while again protesting “the academic habit of criticizing deductively from admitted classics” (“New American Novelists” 262–63).²⁰ Poe is, for Wells, a precursor in critical attitude. Other propositions in Poe’s review on Dickens may be assimilated to Wells’s own approach, such as Poe’s claim that the rational way to teach “what perfection *is*” is by “specifying what it *is not*,” anticipating Wells’s own indulgence in destructive criticism and a tendency to offer artistic standards in negative form, in his admonishment of the failings of books under review (52).²¹ Unfavourable comments about the introduction of

²⁰ I have seen no direct confirmation of Wells’s remark about Poe’s desire for “emancipation,” although Poe did censure British critics for using reviews as excuses for essays upon the subject matter of books under review rather than their literary merits: see Alterton 8–9; Parks 9. He found a review of Wordsworth’s *Yarrow Revisited and Other Poems* (1835) in the *London Quarterly* “one of those exceedingly rare cases in which a British critic confines himself strictly to his text” (qtd. in Alterton 9). In his introduction to a volume of Poe’s literary criticism, E. C. Stedman notes that Poe “looked, indeed, upon the reform and advancement of criticism in America as a special charge” (Poe, *Works* 6:xi).

²¹ Ray notes Wells’s predilection for “‘slashing articles’ about bad novels” (Ray, “H. G. Wells’s Contributions” 30–31). Philmus, enumerating the “basic desiderata” in the reviews (they include such individualising traits as style, humour, and force of idea), implies that Wells provides only negative formulations of how these fundamentals are to be deployed by a critic. For Wells (Philmus argues) humour and thought are essential elements of good style, but Wells “does not anatomize the style of authors from whom he quotes approvingly” in relation to these elements. Philmus is restricted to summarising Wells’s *disapprovals* with the finding that “serious stylistic faults almost invariably signal a poverty of wit and conception.” The summary provides warrant for Philmus’s premise that wit and conception are *necessary* grounds for good style (that is, style that individualises a work), but not the conclusion that they are sufficient for good style and that where present, good style is assured. See Philmus, “H. G. Wells as Literary Critic” 168. Wells frequently issues statements about critical criteria only to note how books betray them. The list of authors handed down negative reviews is extensive. Authors such as Walter Besant, Percival Pickering (Anna M. W. Stirling), and Emily M. H. Clennell are accused of lacking ambition (“Novels” 420; “Fiction [II]” 704; “Fiction [X]” 586). Others fail to convince, are deficient in social vision, lack skill, wit, or both—an author whose work Wells, in *Anticipations*, intimates he cannot get enough of, Frank Stockton, falls into this category—or write books suited only to “serve the purpose of a railway journey”: novels by Hamilton Aïdé, Evelyn Sharp, Ernest Dowson, Gerald Campbell, and John Strange Winter (Henrietta E. V. Stannard) fall into the latter category (“Fiction [VI]” 54; “Fiction [V]” 20; “Fiction [IX]” 386; *Anticipations* 272 note). Admiring Gissing’s *Eve’s Ransom* (1895) for its “finished workmanship,” “minute observation” and “absolute truthfulness,” and its characters “drawn with photographic fidelity” in an early review, Wells proceeds to issue a litany of critical observations: Gissing may be a master of technique but he fails at “faithful presentation of life”; he “has the distinctive fault as well as the distinctive precision of

“inconsequential” material into Dickens’s story and endorsement of a structural balance between thematic and symbolic features in a “whole which would have been imperfect in the absence” of any particular (Poe laments the lack of such coherence in *Barnaby Rudge*) amount to an insistence on matching style and form to subject matter akin to Wells’s call to concentrate on formal and structural coherence, the “bearing” of structure “upon design” (Poe *Works* 7:77–78; Wells, “Certain Critical Opinions” 33). One might compare Poe’s claim that excellence in art “is not excellence if it need to be demonstrated as such” with Wells’s claim that an “eminently readable” book will only produce “an unreadable review; for what reader wants to saw his way through great slabs of praise?” (Poe 7:51; Wells “Fiction [I]” 452–53).

But Wells thrusts a significant, even unbearable burden upon Poe’s shoulders where he explains his artistic preferences. In a sustained piece on “The Novels of Mr. George Gissing” for the *Contemporary Review* for August 1897, Wells refers again to Poe’s piece on Dickens in the course of his argument about a “new structural conception” emerging in the novel (“Novels of Mr. George Gissing” 193). Under Wells’s interpretation it is a conception in which traditional novel structure is subsumed into a broader social end. In a manner similar to his preference for assertive generalisation over close argument in his autobiographical “Digression About Novels,” where he would contrast his own artistic practice with depictions based on the “assumption of social fixity” in nineteenth-century writers of fiction generally, Wells remarks on a tendency among Continental and Russian social-realist novelists like Hugo, Balzac, Zola, Tolstoy, and Turgenev to subordinate character and plot to “some social influence or some far-reaching movement of humanity” and claims that Poe, by identifying how “the ‘plot’ of ‘Barnaby Rudge’ collapsed under its weight of characters,” had detected this “new and broader conception of the novel” (“Novels of Mr. George Gissing”

photography,” is “colour-blind”; he reduces his material to a “harsh greyness” and presents only a “grey world of conscientious veracity”; for all its “fidelity,” the book lacks “absolute veracity” because, unlike “true Realism,” which “looks both on the happy and on the unhappy, interweaves some flash of joy or humour into its gloomiest tragedy,” Gissing’s realism is reductive (“Depressed School” 531). Wells’s combative style suits the forum for his reviewing: Bevington notes an established tendency among *Saturday* reviewers before Wells to treat the contemporary novel dismissively. “The chief merit they [earlier *Saturday* reviewers] could expect to find in a novel was that it told a harmless tale of the life of interesting and believable people in such a way that the result was amusing and entertaining enough to while away a vacant afternoon” (Bevington 154). See also Bevington 198–202 for a discussion of the “hypercritical attitude” prevalent among *Saturday* reviewers and their tendency to shirk the clear formulation of aesthetic criteria. Quinn notes that Poe’s review of *Barnaby Rudge* is largely an exercise in “destructive” criticism (333).

193; *Experiment* 494–95).²² Poe makes no such observation. Rather than demonstrating any kind of “collapse,” Poe held responsible a “misconception . . . of [Dickens’s] own very great yet very peculiar powers” in conceiving he could construct a mystery story “so thoroughly well as his high and just reputation would demand” for plot flaws which, because published in serial form, Dickens was unable to emend; according to Poe, errors in conception and construction not only damaged Dickens’s plot but rendered “the true catastrophe of the novel . . . exceedingly feeble and ineffective”; setting parts of his story against the backdrop of the 1780 Gordon Riots is “altogether an afterthought” with “no necessary connection with the story” or other “*essentials* of the plot”; not only does their interpolation contravene the “unity of time,” Dickens has thereby “*rendered valueless . . . his chief effect*” (Poe, *Works* 7:71, 73, 79).²³ Consistent with Poe’s approach more generally, the argument is that *Barnaby Rudge* fails in terms of artistic “effect.” But he does not make the epochal claim about the novel that Wells supposes, and there is nothing in Poe’s lengthy analysis of *Barnaby Rudge* that justifies Wells’s nomination of Poe as a precedent for his admiration of the European social novel.²⁴

This does not mean that Wells’s claim that his prescription for critics amounts to criticism “after the fashion of Poe” may be dismissed. He correctly identifies Poe’s approach to *Barnaby Rudge* as the analysis of “texture and structure” and Poe’s critical procedure, not only in this review but in his reviewing and theorising more generally, anticipates Wells’s approach, especially in the demand that form subserve the single-minded pursuit of “effect” in art: it is no coincidence that Wells employs the phrase “unity of effect,” the central concept

²² Ray also nominates Crane, Conrad, Gissing, Hardy, Kipling, Meredith, and George Moore, although Wells claims “[t]he highest form of literary art, the Turgenev novel, the novel of types, does not live at present in this country,” making a single exception for Thomas Hardy’s *Jude*, who is “at once an individual and a type” (Ray, “H. G. Wells Tries” 112; Wells, “Novel of Types” 24; “*Jude the Obscure*” 154). See Chapter 1, pp. 42–48 above for a discussion of Wells’s view on his own art as a matter “of the frame getting into the picture,” in contrast to traditional depictions of “social fixity” (Wells, *Experiment* 494–95). It is Philmus who notes that Wells expresses a “predisposition in favor of some version of social realism” in the *Saturday* review (“H. G. Wells as Literary Critic” 173).

²³ Poe made a similar finding in a review of Dickens’s *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840), blaming serial publication for the book’s defects (Parks 45). However, it is true that Poe, despite holding that plot “is that in which no part can be displaced without ruin to the whole,” felt it “but a secondary and rigidly artistical merit” and insisted a “good tale may be written without it” (“Night and Morning” 197–98). Quinn notes that Poe may have been motivated to recapitulate Dickens’s plot in detail in the *Graham’s Magazine* review “to call attention to his own skill in foretelling the solution of the murder mystery as early as May 1, 1841,” in an earlier shorter notice in the *Saturday Evening Post* for that date (332).

²⁴ Wells’s reference to this single review, apparently in preference to Poe’s later and more explicit theorising, is curious. Quinn notes that neither the *Graham’s* review nor Poe’s earlier review on the first few serial parts printed in the *Saturday Evening Post* for 1 May 1841, “establish any profound critical principles” (332–33). But, as I now proceed to argue, there is common ground between Wells’s position and Poe’s theory more generally.

in Poe's model, in his own reviewing.²⁵ In discursive essays on "The Philosophy of Composition" and "The Poetic Principle" as well as in his reviews, Poe repeatedly advocates a method for literary practice in which the artist starts at "the end" by determining the desired effect, "a certain unique or single *effect* to be wrought out," then secures the formal and structural means for establishing the artistic objective, inventing "incidents," "events," and mechanisms "as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. . . . [T]here should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design"; everything must subserve the intended "design," a "unity," the objective always a "totality of effect or impression," a "totality, or unity, of effect" (*Works* 6:4, 40; 7:39).²⁶ It is an approach that places the work itself at the centre of artistic and critical endeavour, but it is also an intentionalistic approach in which the critic must judge an author for his success in marshalling technique to a more or less apparent artistic objective; the approach implies that an author's mental contents during composition are, in part, material for critical judgment; good technique is that which ensures all structural and formal elements "tend to the development of the intention" behind the work, and the critic's task is to work from elements to intention in order to assess the work (6:31).²⁷

Poe's argument about Dickens's objective in *Barnaby Rudge* is based on internal evidence provided by the text, with Poe relating structural and formal observations to the question of Dickens's intention. He summarises the novel's structural "essentials," effectively recapitulating the plot, in order to divine Dickens's "design," on the way to estimating the degree by which Dickens has satisfactorily marshalled technique to a single-minded pursuit of "effect" (*Works* 7:63, 66, 71). By "design" Poe consistently refers to the union of artistic intention or objective, and its concrete structural implementation, using "design" as a

²⁵ See my summary of Wells's review of Arthur Morrison's *A Child of the Jago*, p. 127 below.

²⁶ The same applies to prose fiction as to poetry. "Nothing is more clear than that every plot, worth the name, must be elaborated to its *dénouement* before anything be attempted with the pen. It is only with the *dénouement* constantly in view that we can give a plot its indispensable air of consequence, or causation, by making the incidents, and especially the tone at all points, tend to the development of the intention" (Poe, *Works* 6:31).

²⁷ Poe does not engage in anything like a psychology of the artist but he does view art as the product of a certain kind of force of will, with unity something "imposed by the writer upon his material" (Parks 18). Parks further claims that unity is "felt by the reader" as well as detected by the critic, and that the work of art is, for Poe, a kind of "communication between writer and reader" (2, 18); later in this chapter I argue that Wells viewed art as part of an "apparatus of moral suggestion" for the transmission of socio-moral ideas and values: see p. 147 below. Alterton notes that Poe took his "governing principle" of "unity or totality of interest" from the German Romanticist A. W. Schlegel (68–69).

synonym for “intention,” and appealing to Dickens’s mental contents to explain or criticise structural features (51, 63). Poe rebukes Dickens for employing “inartistical means” in establishing the novel’s objective (63). In Poe’s view Dickens has “*forcibly* introduced” historical details, shifting the action forward by five years and placing his characters in the midst of the Gordon Riots, in an attempt to distract readers from his premature anticipation of the murder-mystery’s solution (66–67). In sum, the review is a mixture of the analysis of Dickens’s text with Poe’s psychological surmises.

Can one interpret Wells’s advice to critics in “Certain Critical Opinions” in light of Poe’s treatment of Dickens, especially Poe’s use of the terms “essentials” and “design,” terms that appear in Wells’s demands that the critic “appreciate essentials” and “understand the bearing of structural expedients upon design” (“Certain Critical Opinions” 33)? Although the instruction to “appreciate essentials” appears *prima facie* a recommendation to attend to a work’s stylistic and formal features (Philmus reads the surrounding passage as evidence of Wells’s preference for stylistic “uniqueness,” Ray as a touchstone for Wells’s own “minute dissection” of “style, character, and incidents”), the appeal to Poe further denotes a judgment about the relationship between “structural expedients” and “design,” between form and artistic objective, technical decisions and a work’s overall effect (Philmus, “H. G. Wells as Literary Critic” 167–68; Ray, “H. G. Wells Tries” 111). I suggest the question posed above be answered in the affirmative, and offer an interpretation of Wells’s prescription mindful of Poe’s own procedures, as follows.

Under this interpretation, I gloss the term “structural expedients,” albeit in less elegant phrasing, as “structural elements directed at an end” or “structural elements necessary to achieve the effect at which the work is driving,” for this is the basis of Poe’s own recommendations to the artist to start at “the end,” and the basis of Poe’s own criticism. I read the instruction to the critic “to get at an author through his workmanship” to refer to estimating an author’s success at executing his objective, in line with the combination of structural analysis and psychological surmise that characterises Poe’s approach to Dickens (in particular Poe’s reckoning that the structure of *Barnaby Rudge* is weakened by poor planning on Dickens’s part); I show below that Wells even makes biographical assumptions about authors based on his assessment of technique and methods employed.²⁸ Finally, what should one make of Wells’s advice to the critic “to analyse a work as though it stood alone in the

²⁸ See p. 129.

world” in light of Poe’s own procedures? To find in this phrase, with Philmus, a summary of Wells’s advocacy of “uniqueness” and authorial personality, in preference to “rules” or “laws” of composition and critical analysis, is to miss a crucial point about the relationship between Wells’s and Poe’s approaches. For the phrase refers to Wells’s attempt in his *Saturday* reviews to extend Poe’s concept of “unity of effect” to the novel, determining for the novel an objective in terms of a social “effect” rather than, as in Poe, an aesthetic one. Poe proposes that formal and structural means subserve aesthetic effects; Wells suggests they subserve social objectives.

Poe ruled out longer fiction as a candidate for unity. A short story may express an “idea” in the form of “a certain unique or single *effect*” but “this is an end unattainable by the novel” (*Works* 7:38–39).²⁹ (This makes *Barnaby Rudge* an unlikely candidate for unity of effect by definition.) But if a novel could not achieve unity for being too long, it could at least captivate readers through character. On *Robinson Crusoe*: it barely possess a plot, says Poe, although “[s]ome of the finest fictions in the world have neglected it altogether”; moreover, it transforms readers into “perfect abstractions in the intensity of our interest . . . enabl[ing] the mind to lose its own in a fictitious individuality”; “[a]ll this is effected by the potent magic of verisimilitude,” by which Poe means the creation of characters that are appealing and credible (“Night and Morning” 198; *Works* 7:368). Wells misreads Poe to have “demonstrated” how plot is subordinate to character in the review on *Barnaby Rudge* (Wells, “Novels of Gissing” 193). But it is on *Robinson Crusoe* that Poe asserts a preference for character over plot in the novel, conceding to Defoe’s book a real effect if not real “unity.”

Poe’s assertion that character in the novel may excuse lapses in other departments where handled properly (his reference to some “potent magic” provides little information about exactly how this is achieved) is somewhat akin to Wells’s claim in “The Contemporary Novel” that a book’s “distinctive value” lies in “the charm of a well-conceived character,” and a character’s charm “in watching its proceedings,” which is how Wells defines his ideal

²⁹ Like Wells, who objected that “length . . . is in itself one of the chief factors of popular appreciation,” Poe derogated the status of the three-volume novel as well as epic and narrative poetry; in “The Poetic Principle” he writes that *Paradise Lost* “is to be regarded as poetical, only when, losing sight of that vital requisite in all works of Art, Unity, we view it merely as a series of minor poems” separated by passages of platitude “which no critical prejudice can force us to admire” (Wells, “Flickers” 355; Poe, *Works* 6:4). See also Parks 18 and Alterton 81. Poe held Dickens’s “Pawnbroker’s Shop” to be a model of unity in short fiction (Alterton 81). Wells is as dismissive as Poe of epic poetry in the Cassell “fourth revision” of his *The Outline of History* (1925), finding Spenser “tedious,” Milton “profound and pompous” (487).

for the relationship between character and setting in 1911 (863).³⁰ It is in his *Saturday* reviewing that this ideal emerges. Ray correctly identifies Wells's exposure to social-realist novels as part of the stimulus for his identification of the importance of character, quoting the essay in which Wells notes the subordination of plot and character to "some social influence or some far-reaching movement of humanity" in Hugo, Balzac, Zola, Tolstoy, and Turgenev; Wells commends Turgenev's novels in particular for "the extraordinary way he can make his characters typical, while at the same time retaining their individuality" (Ray, "H. G. Wells Tries" 113; Wells, "Novels of Gissing" 193; "Novel of Types" 23). But Wells is also influenced by Poe here: it is in the "magic of verisimilitude" that arises from the presentation of character in context, from showing how forms of social organization and character interact, that Wells finds an opportunity to extend Poe's concept of unity of effect to the novel. Wells locates the highest objective for fiction in *social* verisimilitude, what he would term "power of veracity" in "The Contemporary Novel," here envisaged as an equilibrium between character and setting achieved through forms of narrative perspective that enable character to function as type and which for Wells best represent the interaction between individuals and socio-moral and historical forces.³¹

Two reviews from the *Saturday* best reveal this aspect of Wells's conception of the novel. On Turgenev's semi-autobiographical *Spring Floods* (a.k.a. *Torrents of Spring*, 1871; trans. 1895): the novel is done "without superfluity or redundancy, [is] a thing simple, complete, and beautiful" because the Russian's characters are not only believable ("living, breathing individuals") they are "individuals living under the full stress of this great social force or that" and, presented within a social structure, function as types as well as individuals, exhibiting "symbolism" in addition to "individuality" ("Novel of Types" 23).³² Similarly, Turgenev's *Fathers and Children* (a.k.a. *Fathers and Sons*, 1862; trans. 1895): "we have the characters carried,

³⁰ See Chapter 1, p. 19 above.

³¹ See "Contemporary Novel" 872 and my discussion in Chapter 1, p. 21 above.

³² Wells would later view his own novels from *Love and Mr. Lewisham* (1900) to *The Wife of Sir Isaac Harman* (1914) as novels of types. "In all these novels the interest centres not upon individual character, but upon the struggles of common and rational motives and frank enquiry against social conditions and stereotyped ideas. The actors in them are types, therefore, rather than acutely individualized persons" (*Experiment* 477). See pp. 142–43 below for a discussion of how the novel of types is relevant to Wells's views on social progress. Parrinder and Philmus claim that Wells's notion that the contemporary novel places the individual at the focal point of some "great social force" has its forebears, though they suggest it is original in England at the time of writing: "This notion, which reflects the impact of Tolstoi and Zola on English writers, and anticipates one the major preoccupations of twentieth-century Marxist criticism, was certainly not a commonplace one [in England] when Wells was writing" (135–36).

not upon the tides of a man's development, but upon the secular advance in opinion which maintains a perpetual conflict between young and old" (23). Wells renders the implied structural coalescence ("simple, complete," devoid of "superfluity or redundancy") in aesthetic terminology (the work is "beautiful" and represents "the highest form of literary art") but this kind of structural unity is not the doing of formal characteristics *per se*, or even character alone: it is Turgenev's presentation of character in context that unifies the work and places it above "imperfect" art, in which character is *either* type *or* individual but not both at the same time (23–24).³³ In a review of Arthur Morrison's *A Child of the Jago* (1896), Wells defines "unity" in terms of social "relativity," whereby an author is to depict characters interacting in and with a broader social context ("Slum Novel" 573). He tacitly argues that relativity is of greater importance than any merely aesthetic effect: Morrison's book is artistically accomplished, possesses "a really artistic sense of effect" in which "almost every sentence has its share in the entire design" (the comments are, again, the words of a critic familiar with Poe), but *Jago* lacks "relativity" because Morrison fails to present character and events in their proper social or historical context (573). This structural imbalance impairs the novel: "Had the father and son been presented in antagonism with some clearly indicated creative and destroying force, with Destiny, with Society, or with human Stupidity, the book might have concluded with that perfect *unity of effect* it needs and does not possess" (573; emphasis added). The review not only echoes Poe on unity, employing Poe's own phrase, it adds to Poe's conception. Going beyond Poe, Wells's view is that the novel may achieve unity of effect by making manifest the social forces that encompass and influence individuals, presenting social verisimilitude through "relativity": where the context is done correctly and character functions as both individual and type, the work achieves "unity of effect." Whereas, for Poe, unity is a matter entirely of aesthetic structure and formal, compositional coherence, Wells insists on an integration of social and aesthetic matters: a book may succeed in terms of *artistic* effect, but fail in structural social depiction.

Herein lies the characteristic stroke of Wells's reviewing. Working from the general premise that equilibrium between character and context is responsible for unity of effect, he

³³ Wells ends his essay on "The Novel of Types" by proclaiming that "[t]he highest form of literary art, the Turgenev novel, the novel of types, does not live at present in this country," but before the month was out he had found it in Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895), describing Jude as "at once an individual and a type" and, in a later review on another author, referring to the structure of Hardy's book as a "steady, unfaltering progression towards one great and simple effect" ("Novel of Types" 24; "Jude the Obscure" 154; "Mr. Barrie's New Book" 526).

argues that social verisimilitude in the novel is to be sought in narrative perspective. In a review of George Meredith's *Amazing Marriage* (1895) Wells defends the difficult "perpetual shifting" of narrative point of view in the book on grounds that, despite making for a difficult read, Meredith has found in technique a way to depict the essential quality of social existence, showing in fiction how "a soul is determined by its surfaces of contact with other souls" ("Method of Mr. George Meredith" 842–43).³⁴ Printed a fortnight before the review in which Wells would identify Turgenev's use of characters as "types" as the signature of his genius—"individuals living under the full stress of this great social force or that"—the review on Meredith shows Wells was thinking more generally about means for depicting social realism ("Novel of Types" 23). In Turgenev the basis for social verisimilitude is the relationship of character and social force; in Meredith, it is narrative perspective or "standpoint." Wells writes:

There is no one right method of telling a story—only the preposterous Unknown of 'How to Write Fiction' believes that. But for the presentation of a human being, at least, this artifice of seeing through the eyes of characters is supremely effective. Otherwise you can have only the author's view. The theory of a scientific, an impersonal standpoint, is fallacious. ("Method" 843).³⁵

Here he suggests that seeing through the eyes of characters is not the only way to present a convincing persona, and his allusion to the textbook he had reviewed the previous month provides an opportunity to reiterate his commitment to pluralism in method, consistent with his finding there that "[e]very writer who is worth reading is a law unto himself" ("Secrets" 693). The rejection of "a scientific, an impersonal standpoint," "view," or perspective is, however, consistent with Wells's demand for "relativity," lacking in Morrison's *Jago*, in which narrative perspectives and individual characters are presented in relationship with one another and with the set of social forces the book deals with.

Despite rejecting the idea of laws for composition in fiction, Wells's statements on the role of perspective in achieving compelling depictions of society are pretty consistent. For example, the Norwegian Jonas Lie's *One of Life's Slaves* (*Livsslaven* 1883; trans. 1895) impresses Wells with its convincing presentation of a mode or station of life, with the action of social forces revealed through character. Actually it is in this review that Wells first defines character in terms of a blend of "individual" and "type," some seven months before his

³⁴ The metaphor anticipates Wells's endorsement in "The Contemporary Novel" of fiction as a "study of the association and inter-reaction of individualised human beings" (869).

³⁵ The balance between characters' and authors' perspectives anticipates some of the terms of reference for Wells's defence of first-person story-telling and novels "saturated in the personality of the author" in "The Contemporary Novel" (865). See Chapter 1, p. 17 above.

discussion of Turgenev in “The Novel of Types” (“Two Views” 675). Lie’s hero is “defeated at every turn by the natural consequences of his lowly birth,” the book presents “the proletarian’s view of things” and accordingly possesses “amazing power and originality” (675). Reiterating the negative comparison he makes in the review on Meredith, Wells finds that Lie’s characterisation “is on a different level altogether” compared to the “exterior view, a scientific report from our educated standpoint” in Arthur Morrison or Gissing, in which an author “may take a note-book and use his observant eyes down a back street in Whitechapel, and extort our admiration for his forcible painting” but never convince a reader that he has *experienced* the recorded phenomena (“Two Views” 676). The adjective recalls Poe’s finding on Dickens having “*forcibly* introduced” contextual material in a manner “inartistical”; for Wells what is lacking in Morrison and Gissing is the impression that one is observing a way of life from the perspective of someone who has actually lived it (Poe, *Works* 7:63, 66–67).

The review further reveals Wells’s assumption, which he shares with Poe, that a critic may reason from text to author and make assumptions about authors on the basis of methods employed in their books. He accounts for the book’s grasp of “the fundamental questions of social organization” by supposing that its author had confronted them in his own experience: “Assuredly Jonas Lie has been poor, knows the shadowy places of life and the bitter imputations of social inferiority” and can therefore contrive convincing characters (“at once human and typical . . . a type . . . and an individual, true and convincing”) and scenarios, telling his readers “simply and wonderfully, the things that are in the heart of the poor man”; “one must be a proletarian to understand the emotions of the gutter” (“Two Views” 675–76). Lie, who trained as a lawyer before turning to journalism to compensate for a paltry clientele, was never a “proletarian” of the kind presented in the book, but Wells is right on the question of financial hardship and is not alone in making biographical claims about Lie’s book.³⁶ In short, the review on Lie, like the later review on Meredith, isolates narrative perspective as the primary technical means for achieving social verisimilitude, the means by

³⁶ Lie’s biographer also finds that “[b]oth literary and biographical factors are responsible for the artistic success of *The Slave of Life*” and “the author’s poverty due to bankruptcy attuned him to the problems of the deprived” before quoting Wells’s review and noting that “personal origin may account for the unusual intensity with which the protagonist’s predicament is envisaged” (Lyngstad 71–72). Lyngstad cites a French review which similarly found that Lie (in Lyngstad’s paraphrase) “sees society from below, with the eyes of a worker” (71). See Maurice Bigeon, “Trois romanciers scandinaves. I: Jonas Lie,” *Revue des deux mondes* 121 (1894): 208. Lie defaulted on a debt “comparable in magnitude to those of Balzac and Scott” in 1868 (Lyngstad 17, 19). It is perhaps ironic, given his insight into Lie, that Wells does not realise that Turgenev’s *Spring Floods*, which he commends for its presentation of character in context in “The Novel of Types,” is semi-autobiographical.

which an individual is raised to the level of a type.

However, Wells's pluralism does weaken the coherence of his position where he acquits authors for failing to achieve such higher ends in the novel, on grounds of effects not tethered to the kind of technical rationale he provides in the case of Meredith's and Lie's efforts. Philmus defends Wells's pluralism by appealing to "the disparateness of the books he was called upon to review and to his determination to come to terms with their particular accomplishments or failures" (Philmus, *H. G Wells as Literary Critic* 167). A sympathetic approach is certainly compatible with Wells's rejection of compositional rules and his allegation of such dogged adherence to predetermined critical canons as one finds among proponents of the "Academic school," as well as his later public demand to afford to novelists "an absolutely free hand" over subject and method if the novel is to continue to be an "important and necessary thing in that complicated system of uneasy adjustments and re-adjustments that is modern civilisation" ("Certain Critical Opinions" 33; "Contemporary Novel" 860, 872).³⁷ But Philmus's defence does not account for Wells's ability to make competing findings on the same book, and excuses too easily Wells's tendency to provide the most unsophisticated of rationales for a work's acceptability.

On the first head, Wells provides two explanations for his approval of one book, Gissing's *The Paying Guest* (1896). The review of 18 April 1896 is Wells's third outing on Gissing in the *Saturday*. On the earlier *Eve's Ransom* (1895), Wells found that Gissing failed at "faithful presentation of life" despite technical accomplishments, his "finished workmanship" and "minute observation," and characters "drawn with photographic fidelity" ("Depressed School" 531). He found Gissing to possess "the distinctive fault as well as the distinctive precision of photography," to be "colour-blind," to reduce his material to a "harsh greyness," depicting a "grey world of conscientious veracity" (531). *Sleeping Fires* (also 1895) is flawed by

³⁷ Also consistent with Wells's rejection of canons and rules is his criticism of doctrinal approaches to the novel. Wells criticised novels that he considered to elevate doctrine above art. On one hand, such criticism applied to authors who attempted to promote philosophical or political ideas in a way that ceased to resemble fiction and tended toward propaganda; on the other hand, it applied to authors who adhered to artistic doctrines at the expense of stamping their individuality on a work. On the first head, see my discussion of Wells's rejection of books that, in his view, were more treatise or propaganda than fiction, pp. 146–47 below. On the second head one may cite Wells's misgivings about the realism of Gissing or Stephen Crane. I have summarised Wells's findings on Gissing above, note 19. In an essay for the *North American Review* (August 1900) Wells would praise in Stephen Crane "the possession of unique qualities" and "unclassifiable factors" while rejecting the overbearing imposition of artistic doctrine, an "outside factor" imposed upon an artist's "natural genius from without" ("Stephen Crane" 235, 241). In both cases, a work's effect is spoiled for Wells by perceived doctrinal interference in fiction.

characters that “move . . . on the strings of principle” rather than “being driven on the inevitabilities of character” (“Fiction [XIII]” 48). By contrast *The Paying Guest* exhibits for Wells a “peculiar delight” which lies “not in the truth of the portraiture . . . but in the numerous faint flashes of ironical comment” (“Fiction [XV]” 405). Wells contrasts the new narrative style with Gissing’s usual method in which “we are robbed of the personality of the author, in order that we may get an enhanced impression of reality” (405). Although Wells does not find in Gissing the social realism he detects in Meredith and Lie, his conclusion is consistent with his interest in authorial personality, and he commends Gissing on these grounds.³⁸

But in a later extended piece on Gissing written for the *Contemporary Review* four months after his tenure at the *Saturday* ended—it is the essay in which Wells discusses the “new structural conception” of Turgenev and others—he compares the book favourably to the Russian social novel, claiming that by doing without an “exponent” or “exemplary” character, thereby avoiding raising the perspective of any one character to a level transcending social relativity, Gissing has achieved the novelist’s true purpose, which is “to see life clearly and whole” (“Novels of Gissing” 195–98).³⁹ This is a finding on narrative perspective comparable to Wells’s finding on Meredith and extends accommodation to Gissing absent in the earlier review in the *Saturday*. Gissing has relinquished his usual “scientific” or “photographic” technique for one that more accurately represents the epitome of social objectivity; he presents his setting “from a standpoint entirely external,” by which

³⁸ One of Wells’s criteria, though less important and less characteristic than social verisimilitude, is the expression of authorial personality, which Philmus relates to Wells’s emphasis on “uniqueness” and identifies as “an intent to identify an author’s individuality” (“H. G. Wells as Literary Critic” 167). See my discussion of James’s anticipation of Wells on the matter of authorial personality as it relates to rules for fiction, pp. 117–18 above. Wells is consistent in his metaphors, extending the photographic trope from the review of *Eve’s Ransom*, characterising Gissing as an “exponent of what we may perhaps term the ‘colourless’ theory of fiction” (“Fiction [XV]” 405). He makes a similar comment about the Polish novelist and journalist Henryk Sienkiewicz’s *Children of the Soil* (1895), claiming Sienkiewicz allows his scenery to fade “again and again into a colourless background for his interlocutors” (“Fiction [XII]” 769). Wells compares Gissing’s characteristic stylistic restraint (“he has shown beyond all denial an amazing gift of restraint, a studious avoidance of perceptible wit, humour, or pathos”) to books by Stephen Crane and Sherwin Cody, finding in both a “suppression of the author’s personality” (“New American Novelists” 263; “Fiction [XV]” 406).

³⁹ The phrase is based on line 12 of Matthew Arnold’s sonnet “To a Friend” (1849) which reads: “Who saw life steadily, and saw it whole.” For a discussion of occurrences of this “Arnoldian saw” in Ford Madox Hueffer’s collection of *English Review* articles published under the title *The Critical Attitude* (1911), Forster’s *Howards End* (1910), and earlier sociological writings by J. A. Hobson, see Attridge 298–302. The allusion is made in the context of typically Wellsian destructive criticism: Wells has just complained that Gissing’s *In the Year of the Jubilee* (1894) amounts only to “a froth of intrigue about a foolish will” and is a novel “of a very ordinary kind” (“Novels of Gissing” 194).

Wells means Gissing has not aimed at “intervention” in the dynamics of his setting by providing a “superior commentary” from the perspective of a character notable for his “distinctive inhumanities” and a knack for persisting “unchanging in a world of change” (“Novels of Gissing” 196).

These two reviews on the same book differ over grounds for approval, the latter finding in *The Paying Guest* signs of social realism, the former merely commending Gissing on colouring his story with personality without drawing larger conclusions about social effects. It is notable that Wells does not include Gissing among the novelists he commends for social realism in his first review, written three months after Wells’s definition of the Turgenev novel as “The Novel of Types” and almost a year after the first review in which Wells identifies, in Lie, the possibility of character performing duties as both “individual” and “type” (“Two Views” 675). The reason for the discrepancy cannot be Wells’s sympathy for the text: it is not the text but only Wells’s reading that has changed between the two reviews. It is clear that where Wells does approve of novels for reasons of social verisimilitude he does so on grounds of narrative perspective: Meredith’s shifting perspective represents the way “a soul is determined by its surfaces of other souls”; Lie’s book reveals its author’s grasp of the fundamentals of social organization by depicting a “proletarian’s view of things”; *The Paying Guest* shows life “clearly and whole” because for once “the exponent personage has no place” (“Method” 843; “Two Views” 675; “Novels of Gissing” 195–96). Appealing not just to the literary tradition of the recent past, with the allusion to Arnold, but to the figurative imagination of his readership, these phrases on the social potentialities and even obligations of the novel and of novelists are the equivalent, in his role as reviewer, of Wells’s more direct exhortation to critics “to analyse a work as though it stood alone in the world”: throughout the emphasis is on estimating a novel’s social realism, the degree to which a book depicts something fundamental about the quality of social existence (“Certain Critical Opinions” 33). But the fact that in the first review Wells commends Gissing for his ironic interventions in the story, while stressing in the latter Gissing’s restraint from intervention, should act as a *caveat* in the search for consistency in Wells’s reviewing practice.

What explanation is there for the fact that Wells arrives at different conclusions on the same book? Part of the problem is that the periodical review form necessarily imposes constraints on coherence, and Wells was unlikely to have anticipated his reviews would be

preserved and analysed for consistency. Indeed before December 1896 none of his fiction reviews appeared with a signature.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, Wells's reviewing is reasonably consistent in other areas, particularly when it comes to his preferences for the social novel. His tendency elsewhere to put aside his own structural preferences in favour of defending a work on grounds of effect alone, takes to an extreme both plurality and the emphasis upon effect. For example, books that fail to satisfy on grounds of technique and style, or to express authorial individuality or uniqueness, or to strike an equilibrium between character and context are saved from derision merely for being "readable." Wells takes this approach in his first review for the *Saturday*, two columns on the socialist, evolutionist, and novelist Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did* (1895). He finds the book displeasing on grounds of "execution" and (significantly) "art," lacking "strength" and "beauty," to be "coarsely done" technically and its heroine poorly realised (she "is not a human being") ("*Woman Who Did*" 319–20). Despite these considerable failings the book "merits reading," is even more "readable" than "better work" from Allen (320).⁴¹ Elsewhere, the "detailed workmanship" of Conrad's *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896) is "copiously bad," a "dust-heap of irrelevant words," but the book, somehow animated (Wells does not say how) by Conrad's "greatness," remains "well worth reading, so convincing, and so stimulating" ("*Outcast of the Islands*" 509–10). Further examples abound. Mrs. Humphry Ward (Mary Augusta Ward) reveals a lack of humour and wit in *Sir George Tressady* (1896), but thanks to "the plain unvarnished unsympathetic portions of her narrative" the book makes for "very passable reading" despite being "far below the level of much of her previous work" ("*Dream of a District Visitor*" 397). Wells denies a new work by J. M. Barrie greatness on the grounds that Barrie has failed to "express a humour distinctly personal," but, because the book is "pretty, humorous, pathetic, interesting from cover to cover," it remains "one of the most readable books of the year" ("*Mr. Barrie's New Book*" 526–27). Typical of Wells's handling is his claim that a book is "worth reading" for its study of character but that what makes it "extremely pleasant to read" is a series of mysterious, because undisclosed, "tricks and turns" along with a kind of "animation of style"

⁴⁰ His first signed review, on Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Child of the Streets* (1896), was an occasion worth boasting of. In a letter to his brother Fred Wells, New Year's Eve 1896: "Look out for the *Saturday Review* if you get a chance of seeing it. You will see among the reviews now every week H. G. W. which is me" (D. Smith, *Correspondence* 1:281). See Wells, "Another View of Maggie," *Saturday Review* 82 (1896): 655.

⁴¹ In a letter to A. T. Simmons Wells writes: "Made Grant Allen howl in the *Saturday* over his blessed old *Woman Who Did*—my first novel review" (D. Smith, *Correspondence* 1:236).

("Man Who Did Not" 624). One wants to know in what consist these tricks and turns, what produces the animated effect; especially, in what precisely Wells conceives Conrad's "greatness" to reside in. Wells provides no specifics.⁴² These examples reveal an assumption that his readers will accept a guarantee of a book's effect at face value without critical elucidation. They betray in various ways Wells's dictum that the critic shall relate "structural expedients" to "design," substituting for analysis a kind of reviewer's *force majeure*.

Wells sometimes abandons even the semblance of technical analysis and merely describes *how* a book is to be read. On a novel that finds its "artistic redemption" in being readable, he relates how one progresses "from page to page in proper sequence, not desiring to skip to the end nor needing to refer to what has gone before, nor forgetting for one moment the pleasure of the manner in the interest of the story" ("The Man Who Did Not" 624). Elsewhere his directions for readers are meant to mock. On Conan Doyle's *Stark Munro Letters* (1895): "Decidedly it is a book to read; as decidedly it is a book to read with many skips. . . . We are almost minded to furnish a kind of guide to this novel, on the model of the instruction papers a coach supplies to his pupils, this style of thing: 'Read pp. 14 to 20; omit pp. 21, 22'" ("Doctor Stark Munro" 417–18). Similarly for Israel Zangwill's *The Master*: "A guide to the book, like a correspondence crammer's notes to his students, might avail perhaps; 'read p. 72,' for instance, 'omit pp. 273–280.' Failing such aid the book remains, in our opinion, unreadable" ("Mr. Zangwill's 'Master'" 656). Some books are unreadable regardless: Wells finds Zangwill's *Without Prejudice* (1896), a selection, excluding reviews, of the author's miscellaneous writings for the *Pall Mall Gazette*, "unreadable, to a quite unprecedented pitch" and thus, ironically, "a book of note" ("Mr. Zangwill's Egoism" 17). But there is little here in the way of technical justification for such findings. All this amounts to is a sense that for Wells what matters is the effect a book has; the jokes about Conan Doyle and Zangwill suggest that the desired effect, of a kind with "the pleasure" one finds in something well-written, may be achieved despite lapses in technique.

It is never clear where in Wells's scale of values readability lies, or even if he takes it

⁴² But this is not necessarily an inconsistency: the concept of "the unique" identified by Philmus along with Wells's claim "[t]here are no rules for the greater factors," his preference for "innate" qualities of "temperament" or personal character, stake out territory for natural genius beyond critical deliberation over technique (Philmus, "H. G. Wells as Literary Critic" 167–68; Wells, "Secrets of the Short Story" 693). In a later article on Stephen Crane, Wells admits "the possession of unique qualities, that is to say, of unclassifiable factors" to Crane, asserting that what defines an artist may not be readily reduced to critical formulation ("Stephen Crane" 241).

seriously. Writing in a review of Allen's *British Barbarians* (1895) that the reader is an obstacle to the kind of liberty Wells sought for artist and critic alike, he undermines readability as a reliable basis for literary judgments altogether. Warning that "no masterpiece was ever begotten of the subjection of writer to reader," he decries as "prejudices" the values brought to a work by its readers, these comprising a "bond" the novelist must break "if he would see literary salvation" ("Mr. Grant Allen's New Novel" 785–86). At times he suggests the readability principle is an obstacle to the critical task itself, presenting the idea as a kind of paradox. "It is eminently readable," he observes of a minor novel "and, being so, it scarcely lends itself to lengthy reviewing"; "a readable book" means "an unreadable review; for what reader wants to saw his way through great slabs of praise?" ("Fiction [I]" 452–53). By this point it should be clear that this undercutting of privileged values is as characteristic of Wells's reviewing as his emphasis on social realism. The appeal to a book's readability might be seen to mitigate and compromise on standards; equally it reveals an attempt to account for a work's overall effect despite its alleged technical shortcomings, effect being for Wells, following Poe in this regard, an author's fundamental objective. But the approach risks decoupling effects from the technical means that produce them. Even the principle of social verisimilitude, despite Wells's clearly stated preference for certain types of narrative perspective, is not immune to this decoupling. Morrison's *Child of the Jago*, for example, because "almost every sentence has its share in the entire design," impresses Wells on technical grounds, but despite "a really artistic sense of effect" (this is Wells mitigating again) it fails to balance character and context. The suggested remedy is characteristic—Morrison should have presented his characters "in antagonism with some . . . force"—but with no further detail this remains more a point about general structure or theme than technique ("Slum Novel" 573).⁴³

To summarise this section. Wells's *Saturday* reviewing represents his first attempt to assimilate social to aesthetic objectives in the novel. The reviews provide significant insights

⁴³ James anticipates Wells not only in the rejection of laws of fiction (see pp. 117–18 above), but also in the suggestion that a work's general appeal is a reasonable test of its success. In his 1884 essay "The Art of Fiction," James asserts as the novel's "general responsibility" that it be "interesting," and insists that not even "the most improved criticism" could abolish the "primitive" but "ultimate test" of "'liking' a work of art or not liking it" (384, 395–96). The *Edinburgh* reviewer Sydney Smith made similar claims about the importance of a book's effect on its readers, before James. "The main question as to a novel is—did it amuse? were you surprised at dinner coming so soon? did you mistake eleven for ten, and twelve for eleven? were you too late to dress? and did you sit up beyond the usual hour? If a novel produces these effects, it is good; if it does not—story, language, love, scandal itself cannot save it" (Sydney Smith, *Works* 2:439). The emphasis on "effects" is one Wells shares.

into a particular brand of social realism and Wells's association of modes of characterisation and depiction of setting with certain kinds of narrative perspective. His characteristic and most compelling stroke in terms of technical argument is his extension of Poe's concept of "unity of effect" to a defence of social realism in the novel. He extends Poe's impression of "the potent magic of verisimilitude" to an endorsement of "standpoints" which permit the novelist (reiterating Wells's own vivid descriptions) to represent "life clearly and whole," to depict how "a soul is determined by its surfaces of contact with other souls," to examine "the fundamental questions of social organization," achievements to which the critical complement is "to analyse a work as though it stood alone in the world" ("Novels of Gissing" 195; "Method of Meredith" 843; "Two Views" 676; "Certain Critical Opinions" 33). While it is common to find him either commending a work on aesthetic grounds while regretting a missed opportunity for social analysis (Morrison's *Jago*) or, *vice versa*, endorsing a novelist for his grasp of the characteristics of social existence while finding his novel less than aesthetically pleasing (Meredith's *Amazing Marriage*), his highest commendation is reserved for the novel of types, "the highest form of literary art" for Wells, with Turgenev's novels held up as exemplars of excellence in both aesthetic and social-realist terms ("Novel of Types" 24). There are inconsistencies: Wells only formulates the relationship between narrative perspective and social verisimilitude, while his attempts to account for other kinds of effect ("greatness," or how "readable" a book is) are far less compelling, less precisely formulated, if "formulated" they are at all. He is prone to raise effect to an absolute, detecting certain kinds of secondary effects (notably, a book's readability) or advocating social ones without troubling to specify technical rationale for their execution.

Nevertheless, the reviews anticipate the formulation Wells would reach in "The So-Called Science of Sociology" in 1905, for here he defends the novel as both an art form and an interrogation of forms of social organization: the novel of types is, perhaps, for Wells in the mid-1890s what the Utopian novel would be for him a decade later, a form of artistic endeavour capable of performing sociological duties. Wells implies as much where he ventures in the *Saturday* to proffer rationale for his preference for social realism over other objectives for the novel. He provides one such rationale in the important review on Lie, where he commends the Norwegian for his grasp of social questions, implying that it is the interrogation of social frameworks that places the social novel above, for instance, the popular novel and the romance, "scores of books whose relation to life is of the slightest, and whose connexion with Art is purely accidental," as he writes in a column on the relationship

of authors and readers (“Two Views” 676; “Popular Writers” 145).⁴⁴ Another rationale appears in a review on E. F. Benson’s *The Babe, B.A.* (1897), where Wells asserts that literature is the “only possible countervailing force” against the influence of the traditional English universities over the ideas influencing public life (“Making of Men” 174). The suggestion that what is valuable in art is its intellectual sway helps explain Wells’s insistence on social ends in the novel: it is through a character’s perspective upon a given social milieu that a book raises “questions of social organization” for its readers, making of art a kind of cognitive project with intellectual and ultimately social repercussions (“Two Views” 676).

The *Saturday* published the review on Benson almost simultaneously with an article by Wells in the *Fortnightly Review* for February 1897. The *Fortnightly* article, on “Morals and Civilisation,” is the second in a pair of articles in which Wells makes a critical assessment of the social efficacy of art, including literature, and develops Wells’s claim about literature’s intellectual function, made in the review on Benson, into an argument. Wells argues that progress in society is primarily intellectual, a process involving the promulgation and interrogation of socio-moral ideas, that literature may contribute—under the right conditions—to a progressive impulse influencing ideas and, therefore, the nature of social organization. The qualification is important because Wells is not sure the right conditions exist.

An apparatus of moral suggestion

Publishing *Anticipations*, *Mankind in the Making*, *A Modern Utopia*, and “The Contemporary Novel,” as well as the two articles I examine in this section, on “Human Evolution, an Artificial Process” and “Morals and Civilisation,” W. L. Courtney’s *Fortnightly Review* presents an almost complete record of Wells’s critical assessment, from 1896 to 1911, of the role of the artist in relation to society.⁴⁵ In this pair of articles, written during his tenure at the *Saturday* and printed in the *Fortnightly* for October 1896 and February 1897, Wells presents a theory of social progress or (to use the now more prevalent term) cultural evolution, defining progress as an intellectual process proceeding by the transmission of ideas that may be considered

⁴⁴ For discussion of Wells’s distaste for popular romance, see Ray, “H. G. Wells Tries” 110–11; Philmus, “H. G. Wells as Literary Critic” 170–71.

⁴⁵ The dates are 1891 to 1911 if one accepts Philmus’s argument that “The Rediscovery of the Unique” represents the basis for Wells’s “intent to identify an author’s individuality” in his reviewing practice (“H. G. Wells as Literary Critic” 167). The exception is Wells’s article on “The So-Called Science of Sociology,” published not in the *Fortnightly* but in the *Independent Review* (May 1905).

“moral” in the broadest sense, to do with conduct and forms of social organization. He associates art with the “artificial factor” he argues characterises social existence, which he defines as essentially mental (“Human Evolution” 594). Here he renders precarious his view, stated in the *Saturday* piece on Benson, that literature has power as a “countervailing force,” and suggests that fiction, while it possesses the *potential* to contribute to constructive social progress, is actually unreliable as a source of moral ideas. While literature might one day contribute to the development of a “rational code of morality,” Wells writes, with authors an essential component of “an informal, unselfish, unauthorised body of workers, a real and conscious apparatus of education and moral suggestion . . . shaping the minds and acts and destinies of men,” he is circumspect about the state of the art in contemporary literature (“Morals and Civilisation” 267–68).⁴⁶

These articles in the *Fortnightly* supply a rationale for Wells’s evaluative preference for social objectives in the novel. But the claims Wells makes here for the cognitive value of art in relation to social progress represent a critique of social efficacy in art that leads to the rejection of fiction as a form of “serious” sociological speculation in *Anticipations*, setting the direction for Wells’s scepticism about the social efficacy of fiction up to, but not including, *Mankind in the Making* in 1903.⁴⁷ My reading calls into question not only aspects of the critical commentary on Wells that finds in these articles his conviction about the social power of literature, but also the claim that by the late 1890s he was committed to a conception of the novel, “the novel proper,” free of the utilitarian preoccupations that the consensus view restricts to his later work (Ray, “H. G. Wells Tries” 109).⁴⁸ For in these articles Wells specifies a cognitive rationale for literature, arguing that its role in relation to society is to communicate and interrogate the moral ideas that define social existence. While this rationale warrants Wells’s social ideal for the novel, it shows how this ideal is based not in any set of artistic principles divorced from functional ends but rather in the conviction that

⁴⁶ Existing commentary on “Morals and Civilisation” focuses on Wells’s argument for the importance of sexual restraint to continued social progress. See Reed 50; Philmus and Hughes 185. I am interested here in his remarks on the moral commitments of artists and the consequences of his assumption that an estimate of an author’s moral qualities can be made on the basis of his literary output.

⁴⁷ See Chapter 2 for a discussion.

⁴⁸ Reed claims “Morals and Civilisation” shows Wells “believed that man had attained an intellectual level where he would reach a common sense of the aims of education,” but as Wells’s critique of the “apparatus” suggests, this was no *fait accompli* (119). Philmus and Hughes suggest that in the *Fortnightly* articles Wells “already imagines the vanguard of the New Republicans, Samurai, and Open Conspirators” he would entrust with the fortunes of mankind in *Anticipations*, *Mankind in the Making*, *A Modern Utopia*, and elsewhere (12).

artistic value is determined by the possibility of tangible social influences and effects, and it leads him to adopt a sceptical position on the preparedness of contemporary novelists to discharge social responsibilities, as he defines them.

In his article on “Human Evolution,” Wells responds to the British sociologist Benjamin Kidd’s *Social Evolution* (1894).⁴⁹ In his critique of contemporary theories of social evolution and historical development by the likes of Herbert Spencer and Karl Marx, Kidd had argued that natural selection was responsible for the “the intrinsic qualities of man,” gradually subordinating individual self-interest “to the future interests of society” and producing “religious character” in man (*Social Evolution* 286). For Kidd the development of intellect is a “secondary product” of evolution and a collateral effect of the evolution of religious instinct, not the “prime factor” relating individuals to their social group (286). Kidd subordinates intellect to religious instinct as the basis for social evolution, and finds art to be a passive, if intriguing, reflection of its social context, not something capable of constructive social influence. Reductively, he claims that even “the most striking literature modern civilisation has produced has taken the form of realistic pictures of phases of the struggle which are always with us,” by which he means that art passively reflects social ideas (54). Because it reflects social givens, art has value as a source of data for sociological analysis. But this goes only so far: in a finding akin to Wells’s own statement seven years later, preferring a scientific approach to social analysis unsullied by the “illusion” of fiction, Kidd writes that “statistical inquiries” bring forth “in a far more impressive manner than any sensational literature ever could do” the “most noteworthy” aspects of modern life (Kidd 73; Wells, *Anticipations* 2).⁵⁰

Wells rejects Kidd’s argument that intellect is a by-product of social evolution incapable of directing it, posing the counter-argument that “thought” is the active agent in social change and all social evolution “an evolution of suggestions and ideas” (“Human Evolution” 590). This remark and a subsequent claim in “Morals and Evolution” that civilisation is composed of “a fabric of ideas and habits” are characteristic (263). In his 1905 article on “The So-Called Science of Sociology,” where he would assert a fundamental role for the literary invention of utopias in sociological speculation, Wells claims that the “history of

⁴⁹ Wells’s first published response to Kidd was a review of *Social Evolution* in the *Pall Mall Gazette* for 21 May 1894 under the title “The New Optimism,” where he objects to Kidd’s argument that intelligence and religious character exist in an inverse relationship and develops a critique of Kidd’s theory of party politics.

⁵⁰ See discussion Chapter 2, pp. 88–95 above, on this characteristic view towards art among members of the contemporary sociological cohort.

civilisation is really the history of . . . the social idea . . . struggling to exist” (34). In a volume of essays on *War and the Future* (1917), he writes, “[a]ll human affairs are mental affairs; the bright ideas of today are the realities of tomorrow” and “[t]he real history of mankind is the history of how ideas have arisen, how they have taken possession of men’s minds, how they have struggled, altered, proliferated, decayed” (181). In the work in which Wells would attempt to write such a history, the monumental *Outline of History* (1919–20), he states outright: “All human history is fundamentally a history of ideas”; again, “[h]uman history is in essence a history of ideas” (2:709, 748). The claim that forms of social organization are but ideas made manifest reappears in his review on Benson’s *Babe*, where Wells argues that Cambridge and Oxford graduates control English legislation, property, and industry because the universities enjoy “fundamental influence upon the mental development of the powerful classes” by means of the “circle of ideas and suggestions” promulgated there (“Making of Men” 174). The phrase echoes his argument about an “evolution of suggestions and ideas” in the essay on “Human Evolution,” written only four months earlier, and Wells had made a similar, though more limited claim in a review on novels by Stephen Crane and Sherwin Cody in the *Saturday* for 5 September 1896, writing a month before “Human Evolution” that graduates of Oxford and Cambridge controlled “periodical literature and criticism” and thereby the “artistic development” of the nation’s novelists, stifling originality and influence from abroad (“New American Novelists” 262–63).⁵¹ This reasserts similar points made in a long letter printed in the *Saturday* for 14 December 1895 under the heading “The Threatened University,” where Wells urges that “the greater need of science and literature alike is energy and originality” and finds “the finest scholar in the world is but a parasite on originality” (D. Smith, *Correspondence* 1:253).⁵² A line of argument that ideas are the foundation of society and all progress a matter of critical and original thinking connects Wells’s writing on art and society from 1895 at the latest; for Wells there is a crucial link between ideas, art, criticism, the interrogation of social forces, and forms of social organization.

Appropriately, the extension of the claim that ideas are the basis of social organization into a theory of cultural evolution seems to be original with Wells.⁵³ He had worked it out in

⁵¹ Wells claims that the “slim self-satisfaction engendered by the academic training” has frustrated the reception of the likes of Tolstoy, Turgenev, and Ibsen in England (“New American Novelists” 263).

⁵² For the published version see *Saturday Review* 80 (1895): 803–04.

⁵³ Although Reed claims there is “nothing remarkable” about Wells’s identification of a basis for cultural evolution in social tradition, Stover says the argument in “Human Evolution” is original with Wells, who was “the first to recognize today’s anthropological commonplace that, with the emergence

a series of articles on biological topics between 1893 and 1895. Although the earlier articles tend to emphasise the relationship between man and other animal species—especially in pieces warning of the inevitability of humankind’s extinction, because “the world of animals . . . runs so curiously parallel with the world of men” and “[i]n the case of every other predominant animal the world has ever seen . . . the hour of its complete ascendancy has been the beginning of its decline”—by the end of 1894 Wells was attacking attempts to apply theories deduced from Darwinian concepts to human matters, arguing for example that the late age of reproductive maturity relative to other species means the “evolutionary process” of natural selection was “almost stagnant” in man; and that “a true theory of heredity” must

of humankind in the Paleolithic period, the transition from animal behavior to cultural behavior made for a process of accumulated social tradition”; Wells’s essay on “Human Evolution” “originated the nature/nurture debate” (Reed 73; Stover 4, 225). Haynes agrees with Stover, suggesting that Wells “stumbled upon the important distinction between somatic and cultural evolution” while working on *Moreau* (30). Philmus and Hughes note that “Human Evolution” marks the transition in Wells’s evolutionary speculations from a biological to a cultural grounding, describing the new position as “scientific humanism” (184). Wells’s position is similar to that presented by C. Lloyd Morgan (who also studied under Huxley) in a book on *Habit and Instinct* (1896) but, as Stover points out, Wells’s article appeared first (241). Wells reviewed the book favourably: see “The Acquired Factor,” *Academy* 51 (1897): 37. Wells’s conception of modern man is an amalgam of “natural man, who is the product of natural selection, the culminating ape” and “artificial man, the highly plastic creature of tradition, suggestion, and reasoned thought” (“Human Evolution” 594). He claims the distinction is of thematic significance in his own fiction: see, for example, his remark in “Human Evolution” that what he had “tried to convey in my *Island of Dr. Moreau*” was that “what we call Morality [is] the padding of suggested emotional habits necessary to keep the round Palaeolithic savage in the square hole of the civilised state,” and his remark in the introduction to the Atlantic edition reprint of *Moreau*, which in its adjectives indicates roles for aesthetic intervention in man’s moral condition, that, conceived during the 1895 trial of Oscar Wilde, the story “was the response of an imaginative mind to the reminder that humanity is but animal rough-hewn to a reasonable shape and in perpetual conflict between instinct and injunction” (“Human Evolution” 594; *Works* 2:ix). The idea bears some resemblance to a passage from Huxley’s “Prolegomena” published with the text of “Evolution and Ethics” in 1894. Huxley describes a walled garden, an “artificially treated area” in a “state of art” in contrast to the “state of nature” without (9). The metaphor is a lesson in nature’s antagonism towards society: Huxley notes the “state of art” would decay as soon as “the watchful supervision of the gardener were withdrawn, and the antagonistic influences of the general cosmic process . . . no longer sedulously warded off, or counteracted” (10). For Huxley, “art” stands in for the action of intelligence in creating an artificial environment, like society (he admits in a footnote that he means the term to indicate something broader than the common conception of what an actual work of art is: 10 note). It should be noted that Wells’s view on the “artificial” in “Human Evolution” differs from Huxley’s dualistic treatment in an important way. Wells empowers art with a critical impulse: it is something that reacts to other social factors; it is not a placeholder for culture or society in general. For discussion of Huxley’s conception of the dualism between nature and society in relation to Wells see Reed 34–43; David Y. Hughes, “The Garden in Wells’s Early Science Fiction,” Darko Suvin and Robert M. Philmus, eds., *H. G. Wells and Modern Science Fiction* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 1977); Williamson 75. Stover claims that “Huxley’s chief influence on Wells” was not the Romanes lecture on “Evolution on Ethics” (1893) but an essay on “The Struggle for Existence in Human Society” (1888) and notes a number of differences between their doctrines, including the claim that in Wells there “is no dualism . . . as in Huxley, between cosmic process and ethical process” (11). See Stover 7–12 for this discussion, and Stover, “Applied Natural History: Wells vs. Huxley,” Parrinder and Rolfe, eds., 125–33.

be derived from “idiosyncratic peculiarities” or “personal character” (“On Extinction” 623; “The Extinction of Man” 3; “Rate of Change” 655; “Fallacies” 617–18; “Biological Problem” 704). The latter remarks in particular appear germane to Wells’s emphasis on individual difference in literature. He criticised the “germ-plasm” theory of August Weismann (who published a book outlining his germ-plasm theory of heredity in 1893, rejecting theories that premised a biological mechanism for the transmission of characters acquired or learnt by a parent organism to its offspring) because of the implications for understanding the process of cultural transmission.⁵⁴ Wells responded with some perplexity to the implication that “however man’s habits and vices and education may write their marks upon his bodily frame, his children come into the world exactly as if his experiences had been the stuff that dreams are made of” (“Biological Problem” 704). But by the beginning of 1895, he appears to have been starting to formulate what would become the theory outlined in the *Fortnightly* article on “Human Evolution.” In a piece on “The Limits of Individual Plasticity” printed in the *Saturday Review* in January, he attacks the confusion of the concept of heredity with “theological predestination” and argues there remain ways of “recasting” the individual” (90). His reading of Kidd appears to have influenced his choice of examples: he suggests that the conversion of “suppressed sexuality” into “pseudo-religious emotion” raised the possibility that “[v]ery much indeed of what we call moral education is such an artificial modification and perversion of instinct” (90).⁵⁵ This also raises the possibility, for Wells, of an alternative mechanism for cultural transmission. In a later article in the *Saturday*, he anticipates some of the language of “Human Evolution,” pointing out that the “conditions” of life are “artificial” for “men living in communities,” as opposed to those in “savage populations,” which may represent a state of nature; he claims that monogamy contributes to the ability “to acquire and transmit the traditional lore that is the origin of all our wisdom and our arts” (“Duration” 248). Further response to Weismann even foreshadows, in terminology, Wells’s emphasis on “type” in his novel reviewing: an article printed two months before the review on Jonas Lie’s *One of Life’s Slaves*, the first to express a preference for character as type, has Wells arguing that while “individual life . . . appeals to our emotions” and “individual death . . . broods over our joys . . . individuals perish, living on only in their

⁵⁴ August Weismann, *The Germ-Plasm: A Theory of Heredity*, trans. W. Newton-Parker and Harriet Rönnfeldt, London: Scott, 1893.

⁵⁵ This article forms the basis for Moreau’s monologue in Chapter XIV of *The Island of Dr. Moreau*. See Chapter 4, pp. 167–68 below.

descendents,” and “the type alone persists” (“Death” 377).⁵⁶ Such are the developments leading up to the theory of social evolution in “Human Evolution.”

There Wells counters Kidd’s argument for the continued action of natural selection on society, arguing that selection secedes with the development of speech, the later invention of writing, and the subsequent development of tradition and culture, that the only decisive distinction between a man of the late nineteenth century and his Cro-Magnon ancestor “is a difference in the scope and nature of the circle of thought” (“Human Evolution” 592–94).⁵⁷ By Wells’s account, the intellect plays a fundamental role in determining social outcomes; human culture is an amalgam of customs and institutions upon which natural selection gains no purchase. This leads to his assessment of the role of the artist in society. Rejecting Kidd’s definition of art (art is for Kidd a passive reflection of its cultural milieu), Wells argues the “artificial factor” responsible for cultural development, the ideas and traditions comprising social life, may be “deliberately affected” by “eccentric and innovating people, playwrights, novelists, preachers, poets, journalists, and political reasoners and speakers” and he includes the novel in a list of modes of “suggestion” or “example” (594). Here Wells extends his rejection in “Certain Critical Opinions” of reliance upon entrenched and traditional ideas, the extension of “the dead hand of an accomplished literature” to the evaluation of new literary productions, by critics of the “Academic school” (“Certain Critical Opinions” 32). Novelists, playwrights, journalists are “the modern equivalents of the prophets who struggled against the priests—against the social order that is of the barbaric stage” (“Human Evolution” 594). The claim places the contemporary novelist at the culminating point of a vast history of more or less continuous ideological struggle and cultural progress; it empowers the novel, in theory at least, with the progressive intellectual impulse accountable for social progress. It is an arguably self-aggrandizing premise, and one Wells poses in a more sceptical vein in the follow-up piece on “Morals and Civilisation,” as I discuss shortly.

If Wells’s cognitive theory of social evolution is original, so too is the way he applies the evolutionary conception to literature. He does not indulge in the contemporary preoccupation among English, American, and European critics of the 1880s and 1890s for

⁵⁶ See pp. 128–30 above for the review on Lie.

⁵⁷ Wells repeats the argument in the *Outline*: “All human history is fundamentally a history of ideas. Between the man of today and the Cro-Magnard the physical and mental differences are very slight; their essential difference lies in the extent and content of the mental background which we have acquired in the five or six hundred generations that intervene” (709–10).

evolutionary conceptions of literary history based on analogies between biological and historical phenomena.⁵⁸ However, he does share the objection evolutionary critics frequently raised against the imposition of critical principles determined deductively or in an “*a priori*” manner.⁵⁹ For example, the English poet and critic John Addington Symonds argued for “stable laws of criticism” based on an “evolutionary conception” or literary life-cycle

⁵⁸ The key texts in the European evolutionary *avant-garde* were, in England, Symonds’s *Shakspeare’s Predecessors in the English Drama* (1884); in France, Hippolyte Taine’s *Histoire de la littérature anglaise* (1863–64, English translation by Henri van Laun, 1871) and Ferdinand Brunetière’s *Manuel de l’histoire de la littérature française* (1898; English translation by Ralph Derechef, also 1898). Symonds used a biological analogy of birth, efflorescence, and decay to explain the development of Elizabethan drama; Taine argued that literary history could be explained solely by recourse to three calculable criteria, an author’s race, climatic and environmental conditions, and the moment of literary production; Brunetière sought to explain the evolutionary impulse he claimed was inherent in literary history. There is no evidence Wells was familiar with any of their works. However, he knew of G. B. Shaw’s vitalist philosophy of “Creative Evolution” in which Shaw argued that art expressed and explored the creative motive innate in all forms of life: Shaw argued that critics, blinded by the “artificial Darwinian darkness” of the age (Shaw held Darwin’s followers responsible, *inter alia*, for World War I because they had reduced life to competition and denied the upward trajectory of human striving), were ignorant of the action of “Will or Life Force” in art (*Platform* 42–44; *Bodley* 3:21–22, 31; 5:19, 260–61; the texts in question are a 1908 lecture on “Literature and Art,” and the prefaces Shaw wrote for his plays *Major Barbara* [1905], *Heartbreak House* [1919], and *Back to Methuselah* [1920]). Countering academic aesthetic criticism with evolutionary, frequently historiographical, arguments was not exclusively a European or British preoccupation at this time: across the Atlantic, there was hardly a book written in the decades from the 1880s to the 1910s “which deals with oral literature and is not based on Darwinian conceptions” (Wellek, *Concepts* 42). The journalist and critic William Morton Payne (1858–1919) published articles advocating a “natural history of literary productions” in which the “deductive . . . application of rigid standards to every work” would be replaced by “inductive” methods worked out by generalising from actual examples and predicted terms like “survival of the fittest” and “natural selection” would become common parlance in criticism (27, 30, 42–43). Harvard historian Kuno Francke (1855–1930) dated to 1850 the turn in criticism “from *a priori* reasoning to inductive methods” and argued a new psychological criticism might break once and for all the fetters of narrow “aesthetic canons” (623, 637–38). Chicago medievalist John Matthews Manly (1865–1940) urged critics to take up biological concepts as heuristic tools in testing the value of historical explanations, thereby to dispel the “unconscious influences” distorting critic’s views (595). And the Princeton Germanicist John Preston Hoskins (1867–1935) promoted a “genetic theory of literary development” and the use of evolution to make “order” of the “chaos” in contemporary criticism based on subjective aesthetic appreciation (“Place and Function” 379; “Biological Analogy I” 412–23; “Biological Analogy II” 80–81); advocating the abandonment of the concept of formal “beauty” in favour of a theory of social “utility,” in which works that are “verified as true and real” by society at large are considered the most valuable, Hoskins echoes Wells’s functional conception of art—compare, for example, Wells’s remarks in “The Contemporary Novel” on fiction’s “power of veracity” (872; see my discussion Chapter 1, p. 21)—and, suggesting that it is in art that society finds its ideals (“human life as it should be”), Wells’s view on socio-moral commitments (“Biological Analogy II” 73; “Place and Function” 386–87, 396). In Britain, A. T. W. Borsdorf’s call, in a pamphlet on the *Science of Literature* (1903), to abandon “the attempt to introduce the methods of natural or mathematical science into criticism” is a sign of the prevalence of approaches to criticism influenced by contemporary scientific developments (69); J. E. Spingarn expressed a similar sentiment in America, declaring in 1910 that critics (he hoped) had “done with the ‘evolution’ of literature,” while writers like Manly and Hoskins continued to debate the possibility of an evolutionary literary criticism (41).

⁵⁹ See p. 112–18 above for a summary of “Certain Critical Opinions,” including Wells’s rejection of the extraction of critical rules from a canon of approved works.

“passing through necessary stages of birth, growth, decline, and death” while claiming critics and readers alike felt the need to break away from “established reputations” and “the traditions of orthodox authority,” to react in a “wholesome” way “against academical dogmatism” and “*a priori* and deductive methods” (*Essays* 86–89, 104). A book published in 1886 by the Dublin barrister and political theorist H. M. Posnett, the first to use the title *Comparative Literature* in English and part of a new wave of attempts to secure an evolutionary and sociological basis for criticism, applied the “comparative method” of Henry Sumner Maine, the author of a book on *Ancient Law* (1861) in which he sought to demonstrate the evolution of legal ideas, and the Spencerian theory of evolution as applied to society as new bases for the study of literature, in the hope of remedying the “gross errors” (alleged by Posnett) of Eurocentric genre-based “*a priori* notions” of form (42).⁶⁰ In contrast to models like Symonds’, the burden of Wells’s argument in “Human Evolution” is a distinction between biological processes and those responsible for socio-historical development or progress. Where Symonds’ and Posnett’s models imply a deterministic attitude toward literary forms, whereby the roles of individual authors are subordinated to a general evolutionary process beyond individual influence, Wells’s argument is almost precisely the opposite: he argues that art contributes to or guides an evolutionary process, rather than more passively being guided by one.⁶¹

Wells’s *Saturday* reviews suggest how he envisages novelists helping society to develop. It is not by merely publicising ideas or arguments, however critical of the status quo, because a

⁶⁰ Posnett was Professor of Classics and English Literature (as well as examiner in French, English history, political economy, Greek, and Latin) at University College, Auckland, New Zealand for four years from 1886 but returned to Dublin to practise law after a salary dispute (Sinclair 35–36). *Comparative Literature* was part of Kegan Paul, Trench & Company’s “International Science Series”; Herbert Spencer’s *A Study of Sociology* (1873), and an introductory zoology textbook and a work on volcanoes by Wells’s South Kensington lecturers T. H. Huxley and J. W. Judd, respectively (1880, 1882) appeared among the previous fifty-four titles in the series. Maine wrote for the *Saturday Review* and suggested the title when it was founded in 1855: see Bevington 17. On Posnett’s doctrinal debt to Maine, see Simon During, “Comparative Literature,” *ELH* 71 (2004): 313–22.

⁶¹ Wells would have objected to the apparent negation of the role of individual genius by Posnett who, echoing Taine, claimed genius was no more than one of many factors or “causes” of art, most of which were for Posnett broadly social and historical in nature (*Comparative Literature* 85–86). This was a problem for other critics attempting to construct evolutionary models for criticism: see William Dean Howells, “Recent Literature,” *Atlantic Monthly* 29 (1872), 241 for an early objection to Taine’s determinism; early twentieth-century objections are in Payne 39–40 and 137–38; Irving Babbitt, *Masters of Modern French Criticism* (Boston: Houghton, 1912) 237–38; Albert Guérard, *Literature and Society* (New York: Cooper, 1970 [1935]) 32–33. James reviewed Henry van Laun’s translation of Taine’s *History* (Edinburgh, 1872) and found it “a great literary achievement” although it contained “premature philosophy” and was even a “failure” at the doctrinal level, full of “imperfect science” (“Taine’s English Literature” 470–72).

dissertation or polemic does not amount to art. He does commend authors for presenting ideas in their novels, at times acquitting works that fail on grounds of overall effect if they express an original idea clearly. On Catherine Fothergill's *The Comedy of Cecilia* (1895): "The idea is fresh, the tale freshly told" ("Fiction [III]" 797). Gilbert Parker's *When Valmond Came to Pontiac* (1895) is a "weakling" as a "specimen of narrative art" but Wells concedes "it is a refreshing thing to find a whole new idea in a book" ("Fiction [V]" 19). A book by Martin J. Pritchard (Augusta Moore) about a Jewish virgin who thinks she is pregnant with the Messiah is "founded on an idea of an uncommon nature; one which, in the hands of a great writer, might even have shown itself to be a great idea" ("Fiction [XVIII]" 377). But he distinguishes between the novel as a study of character and society, and the "novelette with a purpose," in which writers abandon artistic objectives in favour of lectures on morals or sermonising discourses, producing work that ceases to strive for social verisimilitude and lapses into propaganda, promulgating ideas at the expense of artistic treatment ("Woman Who Did" 319). He finds Grant Allen guilty, in two books, of "preaching" a "doctrine" instead of writing novels, violating the conditions of good taste, proper usage, and art itself, his novels "a mere pretext for an attack on all laws and customs which he considers noxious or useless"; Allen is a "philosopher who masquerades as a novelist," producing a lamentable concoction "neither philosophy nor fiction" ("Woman Who Did" 319; "Mr. Grant Allen's New Novel" 786).⁶² Similarly on a book by Agnes Farrell: "its author has erred in erecting his [sic] view of

⁶² But Wells was sympathetic to Allen's attempt to present an original argument in the guise of a novel: writing in his autobiography, Wells admits that part of his disappointment by Allen stemmed from that fact "I was so nearly in agreement with [his] ideas, that this hasty, headlong, incompetent book seems like a treason to a great cause" (*Experiment* 2:549). Ray suggests that Wells's objection to Allen's books was due to the fact that his own conception narrowed the "margin separating art from propaganda," and Hughes has subsequently examined the artistic relationship between Allen and Wells (Ray, "H. G. Wells Tries" 115; David Y. Hughes, "H. G. Wells and the Charge of Plagiarism," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 21 (1966): 85–90). Wells's rejoinder to Allen was nothing new for the *Saturday*: its reviewers customarily attacked novelists for aspiring to promote political, social, or economic points in view in fictional form; Dickens in particular was censured for "his use of the novel as propaganda for social and political reforms" and sermonizing or "pamphleteering" (Bevington 155, 157, 192). *Saturday* reviewers attacked *Little Dorrit*, for example, for "its inflated and pretentious sermonizing" (qtd. in Bevington 157). Bevington notes the approach was not consistent: they "condemned novelists for not aspiring to anything more than entertainment, and at the same time reserved their most severe denunciations for those novelists who tried to use the novel as a vehicle for something more than entertainment, that is, for attacks on abuses in political, social, and economic institutions" (154). Authors falling foul of the *Saturday* included Elizabeth Gaskell, Charlotte Yonge, Thomas Hughes, and Charles Reade: see Bevington 185–86, 187, 189, 192. And rejection of the didactic novel is another characteristic Wells shares with Poe. Alterton notes that Poe maintained an attack on didacticism "consistently throughout his career" (102). Parks attributes Poe's dislike for didacticism to his general concern with unity: "the whole story or poem should be the communication between writer and reader; if the work were rightly done, the effect would be properly secured by the total work, and not

life into a kind of moral and insisting upon it needlessly” (“Fiction [XI]” 627). Elsewhere Wells regrets the “Puritan streak” in English novel readers, one that renders them “distrustful of art as such, and which is always demanding a hybrid product, half art and half sermon,” rejecting the approach with the observation that “[w]hat we are told, we resist,” adding it is only “from what we are shown that we draw conclusions” (“Fiction [VIII]” 321). More than simply establishing the otherwise banal point that not all prose is fiction, and overlooking the fact that by claiming the public would rather be shown than told he risks contradicting the original assertion that readers prefer “art” mixed with “sermon,” here Wells demarcates between fiction and art on one hand—things that “show”—and philosophy and doctrine—things that “tell”—on the other.

Such remarks show Wells rejecting the notion that a novelist may present ideas in the form of explicit philosophical or moral argument delivered in passages of explication or the dialogue of mouthpiece characters. In what, then, consists Wells’s distinction between the novel and the treatise, between showing and telling, fiction and doctrine? He makes no explicit declaration, though his preference for the social novel or novel of types would appear to be key to how the novel functions as a form of “suggestion” or “example,” to reprise the terminology from “Human Evolution,” interrogating the ideas comprising social structures (“Human Evolution” 594). It is the social novel that raises “fundamental questions of social organization,” depicts “secular advance in opinion,” represents “the surfaces of contact” between individuals and social milieu; what defines the social novel for Wells, in practical terms, is its balance between character and setting, a narrative structure that captures the complex interactions and interrelations of individuals, social expectations and constraints, ideas and the consequences of and reactions to them (“Two Views” 675; “Novel of Types” 23; “Method of Meredith” 843).

It is in the question of how literature achieves social influence that a crucial distinction arises between the reviews in the *Saturday* and articles in the *Fortnightly*, for while in the former Wells nominates individual novelists engaging with the problems of contemporary life (notably Turgenev and Lie), in the latter he indicts novelists, along with all “people who write, preach, and teach,” with collective failure in social obligation (“Morals” 268). The “*apparatus of moral suggestion*”—the emphasis is his—lacks a “common ideal” and misfires (268). There is potential for a progressive impulse, but little realisation. “One sees the

by underlining its message or conclusion” (2).

favourite writer, alert for the coming of the boom” but “a definite stress of effort to determine the development of the public ideals is wanting” (268). If literature is the only “countervailing force” against the established order, then Wells imposes a significant qualification here, calling into question the commitment of artists to social objectives. He avoids the determinism of other contemporary attempts to approach literature from within an evolutionary framework, but reimposes it where he relativises the achievement of authors of the social-realist novels he otherwise approves of in his reviewing.

Is this the first hint of a sceptical attitude toward social efficacy in Wells’s emerging conception of art, fiction, and the novel? Not necessarily, for it is perhaps implicit in his statement, in the review on Turgenev’s *Spring Floods* and *Fathers and Children*, that the “highest form of literary art, the Turgenev novel, the novel of types, does not live at present in this country,” although he would make an exception for Hardy a month later, finding *Jude the Obscure* to possess a character “at once an individual and a type” (“Novel of Types” 24; “Jude the Obscure” 154). In any case, Wells does not assume the novel is automatically a fast track to cultural evolution. What does his scepticism about social efficacy imply for an understanding of his conception of the novel? I suggest it shows that Wells was unable to assimilate completely his defence of the novel on social grounds to a set of structural, formal, or aesthetic principles. For while there is abundant evidence for Ray’s claim that Wells arrives at a “solid and creditable” conception of the novel in the *Saturday*, as well as for Philmus’s observation that Wells exhibits “a clear-sighted attention to narrative detail,” Wells’s rationale for social realism, an evolutionary conception in which the interrogation of social structures in the novel has the potential to contribute to social progress, actually undermines the technical sophistication of his reviewing and negates the distinction he makes in the *Saturday* between doctrine and art (Ray, “H. G. Wells Tries” 118; Philmus, “H. G. Wells as Literary Critic” 166). For instance, there is no indication in the *Fortnightly* articles of how different branches of artistic endeavour contribute to social progress in specific ways. Formal distinctions even of the broadest generic kind appear to make no difference to a literary work’s social effect, or lack of effect: Wells’s remark that “the fictitious example of the stage and novel” may influence the “artificial factor in man” says nothing, in the absence of further discussion, about the technical means by which novels or plays achieve such ends. Indeed art is in no special category of its own, with Wells lumping “playwrights,” “poets,” “novelists” together with “preachers . . . journalists, and political reasoners and speakers,” all factors in “the agency of eccentric and innovating people,” a move that risks undermining

the distinction between art and treatise he is at pains to draw in the *Saturday* ("Human Evolution" 594).

This lack of specificity is not quarantined in the *Fortnightly* and recurs in the *Saturday*. In a review of Richard Le Gallienne's *The Quest of the Golden Girl* (1897), printed a month after "Morals and Civilisation," Wells criticises the author for his "spacious ignorance of fundamental things," for approaching sex "from the standpoint of individual happiness" while ignoring "the manifest fact . . . that sex represents the species in the individual" ("The Lost Quest" 250). The result is to approach the book as though it is merely a treatise on sexual politics, to reduce a novel to its "doctrine" in a manner Wells, who rebukes authors for writing novels as pretexts for doctrine, denies novelists. Attention to the specificity of the work is entirely absent. What matters is the cognitive effect of the book, in this case one that fails, in Wells's view, to engage appropriately with the ideas underlying sexual relations. His objection in "Morals and Civilisation" that "sexual morality . . . is neither treated with consistency nor lucidity in our literature," suggests he may have read Le Gallienne before the piece went to press. The book raises an opportunity to assess Le Gallienne's grasp of moral ideas, consistent with Wells's evaluation, in "Morals and Civilisation," of the collective moral commitment of artists. His call, in "Certain Critical Opinions," "to get at an author through his workmanship" implies an approach to the novel that assumes a critic can make assessments about authors themselves on the basis of their work; what is missing in the review on Le Gallienne is precisely the attention to workmanship the phrase equally invokes.

Part of the explanation for this lack of specificity may be the absence of reflection on a mechanism for the reception of critical ideas by readers of novels. While the reviews present a technical rationale for social effects (Wells's conception of the novel) and the *Fortnightly* articles a broader rationale for preferring social realism over other kinds of writing (Wells's conception of social organization), formulation of the middle term, the role of the reader, is missing. Wells's evolutionary model assumes the transmission of ideas; there is no explanation of how the social novel actually encourages social change. This is consistent with the metaphorical quality of his descriptions of effects peculiar to social realism. While the technical discussion about how character functions as both individual and type where a novelist employs certain modes of narrative perspective is lucid, his statements about "surfaces of contact" and the possibility of seeing life "clearly and whole" are figurative and allusive by comparison ("Method of Meredith" 843; "Novels of Gissing" 195). Even the more prosaic reference in the review on Lie on dealing with "the fundamental questions of social

organization” omits details about what these questions are, and Wells does not relate them cogently to the particulars of Lie’s own method beyond the otherwise pertinent observations about Lie’s mode of characterisation and perspective (“Two Views” 676). The reviews even suggest a certain pessimism about readers to match his adverse judgment on the moral commitments of authors: Wells’s reflections on readers can be summarised with his wisecracks about how “the fate of the modern novel” depends on “the illiterate,” and that, although the “responsible reviewer” troubles himself with “what highly cultivated and judicious people appreciate . . . the majority of readers in the world are not highly cultivated, and anything but judicial” (“Fiction [XVII] 22; “Of Readers” 41). And describing one’s fellow readers as Puritans who prefer a sermon to art does not augur favourable conclusions on the successful transmission of ideas and the likelihood of social change emerging from the publication of novels (“Fiction [VIII]” 321). It is a kind of resignation to going unheard that persists well into his later years: “My mature persuasion,” Wells admits in his autobiography, “is that the distance a novel can carry a reader out of his or her moral and social preoccupations is a very short one,” although here is at least the semblance of a theory of reception—“what principally occurs is recognition and response”—lacking in the earlier formulation (*Experiment* 2:548).

In any case, Wells’s attempt to assimilate aesthetic and socio-moral approaches in one critical model is a significant achievement in context. Little over a decade before Wells commenced as fiction reviewer for the *Saturday*, James had written that the English novel “had no air of having a theory, a conviction, a consciousness of itself behind it” and Wells’s reviewing, his defence of the novel in Poe’s terms, his extension of Poe to an endorsement of the social novel or the novel of types, his encouragement of novelists to take up what he viewed as their moral obligations, may be seen as an attempt to provide theory, conviction, and consciousness to not only the novel and its practitioners but to its public appreciation (James, “Art of Fiction” 375–76).⁶³ To some extent his reviewing follows the traditional lines laid down by earlier *Saturday* reviewers, who held “to an idea of the novel as an important artistic form and not a mere frivolous entertainment” (Bevington 202). But his attempt to assimilate aesthetic and socio-moral approaches is an advance on what came before: Bevington notes that earlier reviewers were wont to cavil over points of style and to exploit a

⁶³ René Wellek points out that James was conscious throughout his career (that is, up to twenty years after his initial assessment) “of the low status and condition of English and American criticism, and the need of the revival of criticism, especially of the novel” (Wellek, *History* 4:215).

new book for a lengthy discourse on subject matter rather than focusing on the work in hand, basing their work too much “upon moral and social rather than esthetic considerations” (202).⁶⁴ One comes away from Wells’s reviewing impressed by an unresolved tension between socio-moral and aesthetic components, but this tension is the product of Wells’s striving to make both ends meet, and is perhaps more a reflection of the state of the art in contemporary criticism than a fatal flaw in his model.

What is unique to the conception of the novel Wells develops in his two years at the *Saturday* is this attempt to assimilate an aesthetic model to a general theory of social progress. It is consistent with his later views, in particular his mature conception of the novel represented in his essay on “The Contemporary Novel.” There his argument that the novel is not merely a “criticism of laws and institutions and social dogmas and ideas” but also a “vehicle of understanding,” its aim to expand “the range of understanding,” reiterates the earlier attempt to distinguish between art and doctrine, and shows Wells continuing to grapple with this distinction while emphasising social ends in the novel (“Contemporary Novel” 871–72). The demand for social efficacy is Wells’s ultimate criterion for art, consistently throughout this period. For this reason, I suggest the view that Wells formulated a conception of the novel in the high Jamesian sense only to later decline to a more utilitarian model giving priority to social objectives over aesthetic ones, misrepresents the nature of Wells’s achievement as a critic and should be revised.

⁶⁴ Poe may have had the *Saturday* in view when he objected to a tendency among British critics to use a book review as an opportunity to write essays on the subject matter canvassed in a novel. See note 19 above.

4

Metaphor and Critique: The Fictional Realisation of Wells's Conception

In his evaluation of “H. G. Wells as Literary Critic for the *Saturday Review*,” Philmus documents Wells’s disdain for contemporary romance fiction. Wells “continually inveighs against” the romance tradition in his reviews, Philmus writes, especially “the tradition established by Walter Scott,” which Wells found to exercise a “stranglehold on English fiction” and to have diminished the achievements of otherwise estimable writers, like Stevenson (“H. G. Wells as Literary Critic” 168–71). In a statement implying a clear preference for the novel proper over the romance form, Wells regretted that Stevenson was “a novelist entangled in the puerilities of romance,” a form preoccupied with “artificialities” (“Lost Stevenson” 603–04). “The romance form prohibits anything but the superficialities of self-expression,” Wells complains—anticipating Henry James’s critique of “the terrible *fluidity* of self-revelation” in Wells’s own first-person novels—“and sustained humour, subtle characterization, are impossible” (Wells, “Lost Stevenson” 604; James, *Art of the Novel* 321).¹ Philmus finds Wells took exception to “the intrinsic limitations of the romance form” and quotes reviews complaining about “scarcely human” characters and plots that proceed “giddily from improbability to improbability” within “vague” settings (Philmus, “H. G. Wells as Literary Critic” 170; Wells, “The Cavaliers” 81; “Popular Writers and Press Critics” 145). Aside from the objection to its unfortunate repercussions on craft, what Wells’s critique of romance comes down to is a rejection of improbable plots and characters. Put concisely, in Wells’s view romance contravenes the set of critical preferences he develops in the *Saturday*.

Naturally, there is more at issue in Wells’s estimation of the contemporary literary landscape than contempt for romance. Before he commenced his tenure as head fiction reviewer for the *Saturday* he had embarked upon a critique of fashions in contemporary fiction, and their effects on readers, in his own romances and novels. They contain wry satirical literary allusions and jibes at his characters’ literary and verbal sophistication, or lack of it, but Wells’s treatment of his own characters, where he depicts them under the influence of the “artificialities” of romance, is more equivocal than his treatment of contemporary

¹ For my discussion of James’s critique of Wells’s novels, see Chapter 1.

romance authors in the *Saturday*.

Such is the case in Wells's first attempt at realistic narrative. Hoopdriver, the protagonist of *The Wheels of Chance* (1895), endures an existence so "absolutely uninteresting" that it is fortunate he does not face life "realistically as such people do in Mr. Gissing's novels" for "he would probably have come by way of drink to suicide in the course of a year" (*Works* 7:50). Wells depicts Hoopdriver as a "romancer . . . always decorating his existence with imaginative tags, hopes, and poses, deliberate and yet quite effectual self-deceptions; his experiences were mere material for a romantic super-structure" (7:50). He has "read precious little," but is familiar with "[m]ost Besant . . . a lot of Miss Braddon's and Rider Haggard and Marie Corelli" and "a Ouida or so" (7:202). The result is a sort of fatuous embellishment in Hoopdriver's perspective on experience. His life is "not a continuous romance" of the Haggard type "but a series of short stories linked only by the general resemblance of their hero, a brown-haired young fellow commonly, with blue eyes and a fair moustache, graceful rather than strong, sharp and resolute rather than clever (cf., as the scientific books say, p.2)" (7:50). The cross-reference makes clear this is an aggrandized version of the real Hoopdriver; the earlier portrait describes a man of "pallid complexion, hair of a kind of dirty fairness, greyish eyes, and a skimpy, immature moustache under his peaked indeterminate nose," who speaks in clichés, "formulae not organic to the occasion but stereotyped ages ago and leant years since by heart" (7:4). But Hoopdriver is merely doing what everyone who wishes to avoid alcoholic self-extinction must do and is not alone in using self-delusion as a way of buffering reality. "So many people do this," Wells's narrator reports in a paragraph that shifts the perspective from character portrait to a form of social commentary:

You see a tattered lad selling matches in the street, and you think there is nothing between him and the bleakness of immensity, between him and utter abasement, but a few tattered rags and a feeble musculature. And all unseen by you a host of heaven-sent fatuities swathes him about, even, maybe, as they swathe you about. (Many men have never seen their own profiles or the backs of their heads, and for the back of your own mind no mirror has been invented.) They swathe him about so thickly that the pricks of fate scarce penetrate to him, or become but a pleasant titillation. And so, indeed, it is with all of us who go on living. Self-deception is the anaesthetic of life, while God is carving out our beings. (7:52–53)

This appeal to the reader extends Hoopdriver's and the newspaper boy's survival strategy beyond the scope of the narrative itself, and qualifies the ironic treatment of Wells's protagonist. Hoopdriver is not a fool simply because he enjoys romance; Wells rejects romance in the *Saturday*, but implicitly he defends it here.²

² But Wells still finds comedy in the literary pretensions of his characters. When Hoopdriver confronts

Wells would later define his scientific romances in opposition to the “tradition of the fantastic adventure story and its relatives” (Philmus 171). In a preface written for the 1933 Gollancz collected edition of his *Scientific Romances*, Wells says his own “fantastic stories” aim to convince the reader of their truth despite their apparent impossibility, “hold[ing] the reader to the end by art and illusion They are appeals to human sympathy quite as

Bechamel, his rival in the affections of Jessie Milton, his “dramatic instincts,” honed by familiarity with contemporary adventure and detective fiction—“Doctor Conan Doyle, Victor Hugo, and Alexander Dumas were well within Mr. Hoopdriver’s range of reading, and he had not read them for nothing”—make him register “something dark and mysterious” in the part he finds himself playing, though he does not “quite understand in what rôle he [is] cast,” and it is the other man who notices that Hoopdriver has the bearing of a detective (7:83). (He is in fact a draper’s apprentice, on holiday.) “Here was a new game!—and a real one. Mr. Hoopdriver as a Private Inquiry Agent, a Sherlock Holmes in fact, keeping these two people ‘under observation,’” though Hoopdriver is unable to maintain the detached objective air of a Holmes: “a wave of anger . . . washed away the detective superstructure, and left him plain Mr. Hoopdriver” (7:87). Wells plays on the fashion for pseudonyms, introducing Jessie’s stepmother by explaining she “is quite well known” to the reader: “That is a little surprise I have prepared for you. She is ‘Thomas Plantagenet,’ the gifted authoress of that witty and daring book, ‘A Soul Untrammelled,’ and quite an excellent woman in her way,—only it is such a crooked way” (7:123). Wells also treats art and literature in his own books in ways that challenge his views, developed in his non-fiction, on the social efficacy of art. In *The Time Machine*, Wells’s narrator suggests “art and eroticism” precede “languor and decay” and presents aesthetic behaviour among the Eloi—they “adorn themselves with flowers . . . dance . . . sing in the sunlight; so much was left of the artistic spirit”—as a kind of futile indulgence (*Works* 1:43). It is the Martian invasion in *The War of the Worlds* and not human imagination in any form that is responsible for “broadening . . . men’s views”; a pessimistic Artilleryman whom Wells’s narrator meets in London holds “ideas, science books” to be more important to his vision of human destiny than “novels and poetry swipes” (*Works* 3:421, 450). Wells attributes a similarly low regard for the literary imagination to the protagonist of *Love and Mr. Lewisham*, who spends only five minutes more each day “learning extracts (preferably pompous) from the plays of William Shakespeare” than eating breakfast (*Works* 7:369). In *Kipps*, Chester Coote, who trains Kipps in social etiquette, reads Mrs. Humphry Ward and owns a study boasting a full set of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, some numbers of *Bookman* magazine, and “no worse an array of books than you find in any public library . . . in fact a compendium of the contemporary British mind,” discriminates between “trashy reading” and serious study: “You ought to make a rule, Kipps, and read one Serious Book a week. Of course, we can Learn even from Novels, Nace Novels that is, but it isn’t the same thing as serious reading” (*Works* 8:63, 193–94). In *Kipps* Wells even mocks readers of the kinds of novels he endorses in the *Saturday*. Helen Walshingham, a woman above Kipps’s station in life whom he courts after he inherits a fortune, has an “intellectual face” and “dressed in those loose and pleasant forms and those soft and tempered shades that arose in England in the socialist-aesthetic epoch and remain to this day among us as the badge of those who read Turgenev’s novels, scorn current fiction, and think on higher planes” (8:65). Appropriately, Kipps’s interest in contemporary fiction concerns the possibility of social improvement for novelists themselves, not society as a whole. Overhearing a conversation among apprentice drapers on the fortunes of literary men: “all this talk impressed the imagination of Kipps very greatly. Here was a class that seemed to bridge the gulf. On the one hand essentially Low, but by factitious circumstances capable of entering upon those levels of social superiority to which all true Englishmen aspire, those levels from which one may tip a butler, scorn a tailor, and even commune with those who lead ‘men’ into battle. ‘Almost like gentlefolks’—that was it!” (8:78). *The First Men in the Moon* provides perhaps the most damning view on the social value of art: Cavor describes how the “distended brain” of certain castes of Selenite has supplanted the need for book and libraries; what is more, the Selenite artist is “flea-like” with a “little brain” (*Works* 6:238, 247).

much as any ‘sympathetic’ novel”; the fantastic elements are presented in “commonplace terms,” the “impossible hypothesis” treated as a “plausible assumption,” and the main interest is never the “invention . . . in itself” because “the whole business of the fantasy writer is to keep everything else human and real. . . . So soon as the hypothesis is launched the whole interest becomes the interest of looking at human feelings and human ways, from the new angle that has been acquired” (*Scientific Romances* vii–viii).³

Such statements echo the kinds of concepts Wells uses elsewhere to defend fiction as a form of social critique, his synthesis of artistic and social objectives (“art and illusion” and “human feelings and human ways”) and the importance of perspective (“the new angle that has been acquired”). Along with Wells’s equivocal treatment of romance and its effects in his fictional practice, such remarks beg the question of the relationship between his artistic objectives in the scientific romance and in the novel. Unlike Ray who, defending Wells’s conception of the novel, glosses over the questions raised by Wells’s derision of contemporary romance in the *Saturday*, or Bergonzi, whose book-length study raises the stakes by making a clear-cut evaluative demarcation between the early romances and Wells’s writing after the turn of the century, Philmus argues that Wells “employs science fiction” as a “vehicle for social criticism” (“H. G. Wells as Literary Critic” 173).⁴ Philmus quotes remarks in Wells’s autobiography that seek to explain his early preference for romance (Wells claims he was, in these forays into fantastic literature, “realizing my exceptional ignorance of the contemporary world and exploring the possibilities of fantasy”), suggesting they downplay the reflexive, critical function of Wells’s characters and plots in his scientific romances; but he does not go into detail about how Wells used his scientific romances as social criticism, beyond an allusion to “the role of Wells’s science-fiction witnesses as explorers of their ‘fantastic’ environment and the meaningful function of such exploration as social criticism”

³ A review in the *Saturday*, deriding an author for not “master[ing] the necessary trick of commonplace detail” in order to render fantastic elements “convincing,” anticipates this demand for the commonplace in fiction (“Fiction [XIII]” 49).

⁴ Ray notes that Wells was “contemptuous of the popular favorites of his day,” and was “particularly severe on the most prosperous and prestigious fictional genre of them all, the romance, whether it was the traditional ‘Wardour Street’ species of Sir Walter Besant, the ‘blood-and-thunder’ variety practiced by Rider Haggard, or the ‘chromatic storytelling’ favoured by imitators of Stevenson and Stanley Weyman” (“H. G. Wells Tries” 110–12). Ray also quotes from Wells’s *Saturday* article on “Popular Writers and Press Critics” where Wells provided a low estimate of the competence of contemporary readers, which for Wells explained “the comparative popularity to-day of scores of books whose relation to life is of the slightest, and whose connexion with art is purely accidental” (“Popular Writers” 145; qtd. in Ray 110). See Introduction, p. 5 above for a discussion of Bergonzi’s view.

(Wells, *Experiment* 309–10; Philmus 173).⁵

In the following two sections, I try to give some sense of the relationship between, on one hand, Wells's scientific romances and novels, and, on the other, his thoughts on the social function of imaginative fiction as examined in this study's previous chapters. Focusing on two texts in particular, *The Island of Dr. Moreau* and *Kipps*, I argue that the figurative structures Wells uses in these books—his organization of episodes by metaphor—explore the kinds of ideas he was working out in his explicit statements on the function and purpose of imaginative literature, in his reviewing, his sociological books, and texts like “The Contemporary Novel” and his autobiographical “Digression About Novels.” Without providing a detailed survey of Wells's fiction it is not possible to provide a sense of development in this relationship. Indeed, my argument—it is that *Moreau* articulates the sceptical view on artistic efficacy that Wells developed during his tenure at the *Saturday*, and that *Kipps* demonstrates how Wells puts into practice his thoughts, worked out in his reviewing, about character functioning as both “type” and “individual”—suggests that Wells was aiming at different objectives in his romances and his novels. This implies distinct phases in Wells's approach. Taking these books as representative examples, however, it is possible to postulate two broad similarities between romance and novel. The first similarity concerns the relationship between Wells's theory and practice: both romance and novel exist in a doctrinal relationship with aspects of Wells's theorising on the social function of art and literature. Second, there is a technical relationship, for in both forms Wells employs a figurative treatment of the relationship between character and setting to establish social themes in his fiction.⁶

Impressions and apparitions

In this section I examine the figurative structure of descriptive passages in *The Island of Dr. Moreau*. Focusing on key episodes, I argue that the book anticipates the sceptical view on the efficacy of imaginative literature as a means of engaging with and criticising socio-moral

⁵ Ray appears to accept Wells's explanation: see “H. G. Wells Tries” 109.

⁶ In his reading of *Tono-Bungay*, Lodge shows that “the main vehicle of Wells's social analysis is not the story or characters, but the descriptive commentary . . . the descriptions of landscape and townscape, of architecture and domestic interiors, and the narrator's reflection on them, which occupy so prominent a place in the novel” (“‘Tono-Bungay’” 218). Focusing on scenic descriptions and their figurative implications in *Moreau* and *Kipps*, to some extent I follow Lodge's approach, while suggesting it is the relationship between setting and character that preoccupies Wells. A further precedent is Newell's argument that “[t]he form that results [in Wells's novels] derives from an organization not of conventional *narrative elements* but of *ideas* expressed abstractly or metaphorically” (8).

ideas, formulated in Wells's two *Fortnightly Review* articles, on "Human Evolution" and "Morals and Civilisation."⁷

In his *Saturday* reviewing, Wells sanctioned the visual realisation of character and censured authors for neglecting it. In a piece on J. M. Barrie's *Margaret Ogilvy* (1896), he suggests visualisation of character is key to a book's technical achievement, and the reason Barrie's book "does, when considered as literature, fall short of technical excellence" ("Margaret Ogilvy" 94). By comparison, Stevenson is for Wells "a visualizing writer . . . I really see quite vividly a succession of pictures" (94). Visual technique makes a character enduring and credible: "of the characters of Dickens, I recall first an image," Wells explains, "then gestures, and then, and then only, appropriate words to those gestures" (94). With writers who are less visual, he conjures up his own imagery "to please myself" (94). But: "Mr. Barrie is hard to visualize. . . . There is no person in this book except the central one that I should have recognized if I met him or her. . . . All the book I have read at least twice, and I search my mind in vain for this vitalizing quality in my impression" (94). Of course this does not tell the whole story of Wells's treatment of character in the *Saturday*. More is required than to isolate "vitalizing" qualities in terms of "image," "gestures," and "word" if a novelist is to present a character "at once human and typical . . . a type . . . and an individual" ("Margaret Ogilvy" 94; "Two Views" 675). Properly examining character "under the full stress of this great social force or that" requires structural equilibrium between character and setting: this is how Wells recommends novelists achieve "relativity" and "unity of effect" ("Novel of Types" 23; "Slum Novel" 573).⁸ Wells's descriptive prose develops and explores relationships between character and setting. A typical technique is to foreshorten or flatten perspective visually and generate a kind of *tableau vivant*; it is an impressionistic, tonal technique that embellishes realistic detail, but it also has thematic implications. I provide some representative examples before moving to my analysis of *Moreau*.

Wells uses chromatic imagery to pattern the text of *The Time Machine* with realistic detail that obtains figurative, psychological implications. When the Time Traveller sets fire to a forest to ward off the subterranean Morlocks, he describes a "space . . . as bright as day with the reflection of the fire . . . [an] arm of the burning forest, with yellow tongues already writhing from it, completely encircling the space with a fence of fire . . . [and] thirty or forty

⁷ *Moreau* appeared in April 1896, the articles in October 1896 and February 1897.

⁸ See Chapter 2, pp. 125–28 above.

Morlocks, dazzled by the light and heat, and blundering hither and thither against each other in their bewilderment"; he confesses he killed a number of the creatures before watching them destroy themselves: "Thrice I saw Morlocks put their heads down in a kind of agony and rush into the flames" (*Works* 1:97–98). Wells resolves the reversal of day and night that the Time Traveller describes in simile ("as bright as day") by depicting the actual daybreak: "at last, above the subsiding red of the fire, above the streaming masses of black smoke and the whitening and blackening tree stumps, and the diminishing numbers of these dim creatures, came the white light of day" (1:98). Accounting for the photophobic Morlocks' erratic and suicidal behaviour, the chromatic imagery adds descriptive force to the episode. But it also expresses the Time Traveller's own anxiety over losing Weena, his Eloi companion, and his struggle to recover the Time Machine.

Chromatic imagery sometimes produces straightforward comic effects. Bedford, a failed speculator in business with literary pretensions and Wells's narrator in *The First Men in the Moon*, describes an impression of Cavor, an eccentric scientist who invents a substance "opaque to gravitation" (*Works* 6:18). He observes Cavor gesticulating and "buzzing like something electric" in his nightly walks on the flats of Romney Marsh: "The sun had set, the sky was a vivid tranquillity of green and yellow, and against that he came out black, the oddest little figure" (6:7). Here the effect is comedic, but Bedford's impressions of Cavor also belie his proclivity, becoming increasingly apparent as his story develops, to see in Cavor's invention an opportunity for commercial exploitation.

In *The Wheels of Chance*, Wells uses chromatic imagery as a kind of scenic counterpoint to a character's mental state. Hoopdriver encounters Bechamel and Jessie Milton "having a row" beneath a railway arch, by virtue of his inability to steer his bicycle around an abrupt right turn (*Works* 7:63). He rides away embarrassed, stopping in town to find food and board after disorientating himself "in a tortuous tangle of roads" while attempting to avoid crossing the pair again (7:69–70). Calling on a teashop owned by a "neat bright-eyed little old lady" he enjoys a meal of sausages and tea in a room that "presently . . . was to be his bedroom," perusing a visitors' book "full of the most humorous and flattering remarks about the little old lady, in verse and prose," with "rhymes that read well—even with your mouth full of sausage" (7:70). He entertains "a vague idea of 'drawing something'" and imagines his landlord discovering his caricature: "'My gracious! One of them *Punch* men,' she would say" (7:70). Then Wells presents a topographical description of the room's features and outlook:

The room had a curtained recess and a chest of drawers . . . and the day part of it was decorated with framed Oddfellows' certificates and gilt-backed books and portraits, and kettle-holders and

all kinds of beautiful things made out of wool; very comfortable it was indeed. The window was lead framed and diamond paned, and through it one saw the corner of the vicarage and a pleasant hill crest in dusky silhouette against the twilight sky. (7:70–71)

The passage presents Hoopdriver's perspective on surroundings, although there is some irony here regarding his naive aesthetic impressions, his estimations of what constitutes comfortable and well-appointed lodgings (the recess, certificates, and decorations amount to a somewhat plain impression). As the passage develops, Wells further associates the description of scene with Hoopdriver's state of postprandial reflection. Finishing his meal, Hoopdriver lights a cigarette and proceeds "swaggering out into the twilight street"; Wells's imagery implies a kind of idle mental reflection on Hoopdriver's part: "All shadowy blue between its dark brick houses was the street, with a bright yellow window here and there and splashes of green and red where the chemist's illumination fell across the road" (7:71). The technique occurs again when Hoopdriver returns to his room to reflect on a further encounter with Bechamel:

Mr. Hoopdriver returned to the little room with the lead-framed windows where he had dined, and where the bed was now comfortably made, sat down on the box under the window, stared at the moon rising on the shining vicarage roof, and tried to collect his thoughts. How they whirled at first! . . . The sky was deep blue, with a luminous afterglow along the black edge of the hill, and the white moon overhead, save for a couple of yellow stars, had the sky to herself. (7:90–91)

Here Hoopdriver's cogitation is no longer idle—his thoughts "were kinetic"—and the scenic description provides a contrast with Wells's treatment of his protagonist's reflections on the day's events (7:91).

Wells applies this technique to greater ends in *Love and Mr. Lewisham*. Here it involves contrasts that in their association of characters' states of mind with environmental phenomena or other details of setting, function as a kind of pathetic fallacy. A good example is Wells's description of the "atmosphere" upon Lewisham's entry into the hall of Whortley Proprietary School, where he is assistant master on forty pounds a year: "The hall with its insistent scholastic suggestions, its yellow marbled paper, its long rows of hat-pegs, its disreputable array of umbrellas, a broken mortar-board and a tattered and scattered *Principia*, seemed dim and dull in contrast with the luminous stir of the early March evening outside"; Lewisham is struck by an "unusual sense of the greyness of a teacher's life, of the greyness indeed of the life of all studious souls" (*Works* 7:248). Later Lewisham and Ethel enjoy an evening "ramble" in the countryside: "The sun was already a golden ball above the blue hills in the west—it turned our two young people into figures of flame . . . Behind them the moon, almost full, hung in the blue sky above the tree-tops, ghostly and indistinct, and slowly gathered to itself such light as the setting sun left for it in the sky" (7:286). The couple

relocate to a “scene . . . no longer little Whortley embedded among its trees, ruddy banks, parks and common land, but the grey spaciousness of West London” (7:300). Here setting functions as a device for Wells to explore the consequences of environment upon emotional and mental life.⁹ The negation of colour characterises Lewisham’s passage from adolescence to adulthood: “Our young couple . . . found the sky gathering greyly overhead and saw one another for the first time clearly in the light of every day”; each quarrel “effaced from yet another line of their lives the lingering tints of romantic colour”; after six months of marriage all of the “roseate tints seemed gone” (7:452–53, 460). And Wells mocks his protagonist with chromatic symbolism. Lewisham becomes a Socialist when he begins “to feel something of the dull stress deepening to absolute wretchedness and pain, which is the colour of so much human life in modern London,” but his first inclination is to do something symbolic in order “to manifest the new faith that was in him” (7:303–04). He buys a red tie but is embarrassed when his request for one in “[b]lood colour” is met by the shop assistant’s puzzlement: “‘A bright scarlet, please,’ said Lewisham, blushing” (7:304).¹⁰

In *Kipps*, Wells’s protagonist is impelled to confess his love to Ann Pornick when he encounters her sitting “upon the gate, dark against vast masses of flaming crimson and darkling purple” (*Works* 8:26). A similar effect occurs later in the novel after Kipps has proposed marriage to Helen Walshingam: “The sky was a vast splendour, and then close to them were the dark, protecting trees and the shining, smooth, still water. He was an erect black outline to her To him her face was a warm dimness. In truth he could not see her eyes, but it seemed to his love-witched brain that he did, and that they shone out at him like dusky stars” (8:219–20). The effect is a kind of romantic abstraction; it signifies heightened emotion, while hinting at the possibility of misrecognition or misunderstanding.

Such passages suggest a preoccupation with visual detail, though it would be a mistake to assume Wells is interested in visual detail for its own sake. For descriptive passages are integral to his narrative technique and aim at specific objectives.¹¹ In the next section of this

⁹ See further discussion of this exploration in terms of Wells’s use of spatial metaphor in *Lewisham*, pp. 169–71 below.

¹⁰ However, the association of Lewisham’s “spiritual development” with his surroundings is not conducted solely in chromatic terms (7:303). See pp. 169–71 below for my discussion of spatial metaphor in the book.

¹¹ Wells suggests as much where he distinguishes, in a passage in his autobiography, between his own subordination of technique to overall objective, and what he terms Conrad’s “over-sensitized receptivity” (*Experiment* 619). “I remember a dispute we had one day as we lay on the Sandgate beach and looked out to sea,” Wells writes: “How, he demanded, would I describe how that boat out there, sat or rode or danced or quivered on the water? I said that in nineteen cases out of twenty I would just

chapter I examine the relationship between plot, character, and setting in *Kipps* to show how Wells uses spatial metaphor in descriptive passages to treat character in terms of the individual-type distinction he endorses in his *Saturday* reviewing. In the remainder of this section, I explore the relationship between scenic description in *Moreau* and Wells's critique of art as a means of constructive socio-moral engagement.

Prendick's first-person narration dramatizes his struggle to come to terms with the moral and ontological implications of surgical experiments on animals carried out by Moreau.¹² Philmus and Huntington have shown how the narrative action is premised on Prendick's cognitive disarrangement. Philmus notes that events in the book's early chapters describing Prendick's survival at sea after a shipwreck have a "purgative effect," eliminating "any clear distinction between man and beast," with the result that Prendick "arrives on Moreau's island having already lost any firm sense of the norms of civilized human behaviour" ("Satiric Ambivalence" 6). Huntington finds in the book, particularly in the final chapter in which Prendick returns to London only to be discouraged in his fellow man by signs of the bestiality he encountered on the island, an "ontological . . . confusion of animal and human, the collapse of all claim that a biological difference earns a moral position" (*Logic of Fantasy* 67). Prendick's discovery of the perverse experiments taking place on the island and his various encounters with Moreau's "Beast Folk" entrench his cognitive estrangement. His account comprises a high degree of figurative structure; key events in his account are related through chromatic imagery and metaphor. While the technique endows the text with pattern, it also raises the question of the cognitive value of such patterning or aesthetic ordering. My hypothesis is as follows: Wells interrogates Prendick's attempt to attenuate his ontological confusion and cognitive disarrangement by aesthetic means; Wells's treatment in *Moreau* of the cognitive value of aesthetic forms of response to socio-moral challenge anticipates his finding, in the *Fortnightly Review* article on "Morals and Civilisation," that "a definite stress of effort to determine the development of public ideals is wanting" (268).¹³

let the boat be there in the commonest phrases possible. Unless I wanted the boat to be important I would not give it an outstanding phrase and if I wanted to make it important then the phrase to use would depend on the angle at which the boat became significant. But it was all against Conrad's oversensitized receptivity that a boat could ever be just a boat. He wanted to see it with a definite vividness of his own. But I wanted to see it and to see it only in relation to something else—a story, a thesis" (619).

¹² Abandoning his career in England after a public scandal over his research, Moreau has spent eleven years on a remote Pacific island when Prendick encounters him. His experiments have produced a "travesty of humanity" in the form of "humanised animals" (*Works* 2:88, 99).

¹³ For discussion, see Chapter 3, pp. 147–48 above.

The figurative structure of the book implicates art in Prendick's cognitive crisis. The key figurations occur in descriptive passages recounting Prendick's visual interrogation of the island environment, in which he projects his mental disorder upon surroundings. An episode in which the howls of a puma undergoing one of Moreau's operations disturb Prendick's postprandial reading is a good example of the technique.¹⁴ Prendick steps outside his hut, but finds the noise "even louder outdoors" and escapes into the hills behind the encampment (*Works* 2:45). The affective quality of the experience conditions his relationship with surroundings and he appears unable to define his whereabouts clearly until he can no longer hear the beast, describing both the environment and his psychological state in chromatic terms: "in spite of the brilliant sunlight and the green fans of the trees waving in the soothing sea-breeze, the world was a confusion, blurred with drifting red and black phantasms, until I was out of earshot of the house" (2:45). Actually it is only Prendick's state of shock that transforms "the world," a term denoting here not merely physical environment but a "confusion" of environment and psychological response—in other words, Prendick's subjective processing of phenomena.

As the episode progresses, Prendick maintains this chromatic and impressionistic regard for environmental detail. A prolonged passage (I have excerpted the text quoted below from a passage of about 650 words in Chapter IX, "The Thing in the Forest") further develops the cognitive issue at stake. Prendick attempts to salvage some measure of psychological equilibrium by imposing a kind of aesthetic order on the island environment in chromatic terms, but his attempt is thwarted when he encounters a creature in the scrub:

On the further side [of a small stream running down a valley] I saw through a bluish haze a tangle of trees and creepers, and above these again the luminous blue of the sky. Here and there a splash of white or crimson marked the blooming of some trailing epiphyte. I let my eyes wander over this scene for a while . . . and presently I fell into a tranquil state midway between dozing and waking.

From this I was aroused, after I know not how long, by a rustling amidst the greenery on the other side of the stream. For a moment I could see nothing but the waving summits of the ferns and reeds. Then suddenly upon the bank of the stream appeared something—at first I could not distinguish what it was. It bowed its head to the water and began to drink. Then I saw it was a man, going on all fours like a beast!

He was clothed in bluish cloth, and was of a copper-coloured hue, with black hair. [Prendick disturbs the creature; it] slunk off among the bushes to the right of me, and I heard the swish of the fronds grow faint in the distance and die away. . . . I was startled by a noise behind me and, turning suddenly, saw the flapping white tail of a rabbit vanishing up the slope. I jumped to my feet. . . .

The apparition of this grotesque half-bestial creature had suddenly populated the stillness of the afternoon for me. . . . I was greatly disturbed at the apparition. I walked to the left along the slope, turning my head about and peering this way and that among the straight stems of the trees.

¹⁴ The episode commences at the end of Chapter VIII and continues in Chapter IX.

Why should a man go on all fours and drink with his lips? Presently I heard an animal wailing again, and taking it to be the puma, I turned about and walked in a direction diametrically opposite to the sound. . . .

I was startled by a great patch of vivid scarlet on the ground, and going up to it found it to be a peculiar fungus branched and corrugated like a foliaceous lichen, but deliquescing into slime at the touch. And then in the shadow of some luxuriant ferns I came upon an unpleasant thing, the dead body of a rabbit, covered with shining flies but still warm, and with its head torn off. I stopped aghast at the sight of the scattered blood. (2:46–48)

The passage is notable for its botanical detail, but Prendick cannot resolve the ontological question posed here—the distinction, or lack of distinction, between “man” and “beast”—by descriptive means. He supplies a resolution—“it was a man”—but this is immediately undercut by the qualifying phrase “going on all fours like a beast” and Prendick’s formulation of the ontological problem: “Why should a man go on all fours and drink with his lips?” The episode brings to crisis the implied opposition between Prendick’s subjective view on “world” as a “confusion” at the end of Chapter VIII and the more objective, ordered outlook which opens Chapter IX.

The figurative technique is one that clusters environmental features within chromatic visual rhymes. The “white or crimson” of the island flora anticipates “the flapping white tail of a rabbit,” the “vivid scarlet” of a fungus patch, and the “scattered blood” of the decapitated rabbit (2:46–48). The “bluish haze” through which Prendick observes his surroundings is delineated by “the luminous blue of the sky” before narrowing to the “bluish cloth” of the semi-bestial figure in the distance and later the “blue shadows” into which the figure disappears (2:53).¹⁵ The “greenery” of the “waving summits of ferns and reeds” recalls the “green fans of the trees waving” at the end of the previous chapter (2:45, 47). Wells is using scenic description as metaphor: the patterning in chromatic terms reveals Prendick’s attempt to meaningfully process his experience, to take control of his psychological response, to examine the ontological status of the “apparition” he has encountered. Prendick’s intention by escaping into the island hinterland is to attenuate his psychological disarray. The chromatic clusters, despite the fact that they pattern and organize his account, blur

¹⁵ Stover writes that the colour blue suggests Wells’s Beast Folk “may be seen as experimental prototypes of a labor force yielding to collective submission” because of the pervasive association of blue with “subjected labor” elsewhere in Wells’s writing and in “the Indo-European color code” generally (96 note 47). But the technique has structural and thematic implications within the text, too. By describing the “apparition” solely in terms of impressions of colour and action (its “bluish” garb, “copper-coloured hue” and “black hair,” its “bowed head,” its animalistic locomotion, “going on all fours like a beast” and “drink[ing] with his lips”) Wells anticipates the later recitation in Chapter XII of the “Law,” in which Prendick participates in the proto-liturgical chanting of the Beast Folk’s refrain: “Not to go on all-Fours; *that* is the Law. . . . Not to suck up Drink; *that* is the Law. Are we not Men?” (2:72).

rather than clarify ontological distinctions. The effect is one of contrast between the chromatically organized patterning of Prendick's text and the ontological problem that arises within it.

This textual strategy, the use of chromatic clustering to interrogate Prendick's aesthetic response to experience, is consistent throughout the episode. The visual cues available to Prendick and the acuity of his perception decline as the action continues into the late afternoon and evening. His attention shifts from botanical and topographical detail to the effect of nightfall on perception:

The colourless clearness that comes after the sunset flush was darkling. The blue sky above grew momentarily deeper, and the little stars one by one pierced the attenuated light; the interspaces of the trees, the gaps in the further vegetation that had been hazy blue in the daylight, grew black and mysterious.

I pushed on. Colour vanished from the world, the tree tops rose against the luminous blue sky in inky silhouette, and all below that outline melted into formless blackness. (2:53)

This is compelling as a description of twilight but the effect is also to develop further the association of chromatic clustering as a descriptive technique with the cognitive problem of the status of Prendick's "apparition." He loses his way in the dark and is stalked by a figure that barely emerges from the shadows long enough for him to confirm that he is not pursued by "a mere creation of [his] disordered imagination" (2:54). The figure appears as a "shapeless lump" which "heave[s] up momentarily against the sky-line and vanishe[s] again"; attempting to find his bearings, Prendick turns "resolutely towards the sound of the sea"; breaking out of the bush and into a run along a stretch of beach he swings at his pursuer with an improvised club (2:54–55). He reduces it to a "black heap" on the shore and, unable to resolve the question of its identity or its status as man or beast, regains his bearings upon the fortuitous reappearance of chromatic and auditory cues:

I could not bring myself to approach that black heap. I left it there with the water rippling round it under the still stars, and, giving it a wide berth, pursued my way towards the yellow glow of the house. And presently, with a positive effect of relief, came the pitiful moaning of the puma, the sound that had originally driven me out to explore this mysterious island. (2:57)

Considered as a whole the episode is coherently structured. It is auditory rather than chromatic detail that provides the frame—the puma's cries drive Prendick out of his hut and greet him upon his return—and sounds are the prompts for action and for Prendick's topographical and cognitive investigations: he is disturbed from his reading by the Puma's cries, then roused from his slumber by a rustling in the tropical greenery.¹⁶ Chromatic

¹⁶ There is a wider auditory framing in the book. Prendick first encounters the puma on board the *Ipecacuanha*, which is transporting the animal to Moreau's island. But he hears it—a "growling"

metaphor further structures the episode. There are a number of transitions, from the topographical clarity of the scenic description opening the chapter, to the chromatic clustering representing the onset of Prendick's confusion, to the obscuration of chromatic cues, to their fortuitous reappearance at the end of the chapter. In short, the style of Prendick's narrative is decidedly *literary*.¹⁷

However, the discrepancy between the literary quality of Prendick's narrative and his ongoing cognitive disarray raises similar kinds of questions regarding literary efficacy to those Wells would later pose in the *Fortnightly Review* articles. There Wells would argue that art's social role is to communicate and interrogate the moral ideas that comprise and define the texture of social existence.¹⁸ In the first article he includes fiction among kinds of "example" by which socio-moral ideas are to be interrogated ("Human Evolution" 594). But in the following piece, he expresses reservations about the state of the art in contemporary fiction, detecting a lack "of effort to determine the development of public ideals" ("Morals and Evolution" 268). I suggest *Moreau* dramatises this sceptical view. For Prendick's narrative is an example not of accommodation to novel, if confronting, ideas about human morality—

implying "so much savage anger that it startled me"—before he sees it "cramped in a little iron cage" on deck (2:10, 12). And in the concluding chapter of the book he describes the "well-nigh insupportable" horror of his encounters with his fellow Londoners upon his return, noting: "their voices came through windows . . . and prowling women would mew after me . . . weary workers go coughing by me . . . old people . . . pass murmuring to themselves, and all unheeding a ragged tail of gibbing children" (2:171–72).

¹⁷ Bergonzi notes *Moreau* is "composed of extremely literary materials" (*Early H. G. Wells* 100). This literary self-consciousness is no peripheral matter. The "Law" (see note 15 above) is a satire on Kipling's *Jungle Book* (1894) and *Second Jungle Book* (1895), and "the aspect of the book which produced the most serious denunciations" upon its original publication (Borello 57; Reed, "Literary Piracy" 537). Most importantly, it is in the Law that "the distinctions between man and beast" that define the cognitive challenge posed by the book, are carefully laid out (Anderson, *Bennett, Wells and Conrad* 124). It is likely Wells wanted his readers to recognise the allusion. Reed notes that in Kipling's *Jungle Books* it is the character Baloo who recites the "Law of the Jungle" ("Vanity of Law" 136). Wells parodies this arrangement in *Moreau*: when Prendick encounters a group of Moreau's Beast Folk "reciting some complicated gibberish" in a forest clearing, he notes that "a kind of tune crept into their rhythmic recitation, and a refrain—'Aloola,' or 'Baloola,' it sounded like" (2:50). More generally, critics have detected in the book a range of "literary antecedents," including Swift, Poe, Defoe, Stevenson, Mary Shelley, Shakespeare, and Conrad (Raknem 395–97; Straub xviii). Wells invokes Oscar Wilde in the preface to the Atlantic Edition volume containing *Moreau*, claiming the story was conceived in response to Wilde's 1895 trial on charges of gross indecency: "this story was the response of an imaginative mind to the reminder that humanity is but animal rough-hewn to a reasonable shape and in perpetual conflict between instinct and injunction" (2:ix). However, Stover cites personal correspondence with Philmus objecting that "Moreau was started in 1894," before the Wilde trial commenced (92 note 41). Prendick is encountered reading "a crib of Horace" when he first hears the cries of an animal under Moreau's knife, though he notes earlier that Greek and Latin are "languages I cannot read with any comfort" (*Works* 2:37, 45). See Chapter 2, p. 98 for Wells's thoughts on the use of Greek and Latin in technical philosophical writing.

¹⁸ See Chapter 2, pp. 137–49 above.

“the collapse,” to repeat Huntington’s phrase, “of all claim that a biological difference earns a moral position”—but of the retreat from such accommodation (*Logic of Fantasy* 67).

Wells had posed the possibility of the surgical manipulation of animals over a year before *Moreau* appeared. An article on “The Limits of Individual Plasticity” printed in the *Saturday Review* for 19 January 1895 sets out Wells’s thoughts on the possibility of modifying the “inherent form and disposition” of living organisms, conceiving of a “living being . . . as raw material, as something plastic, something that may be shaped and altered . . . and the organism as a whole developed far beyond its apparent possibilities” (“Limits” 90).¹⁹ The process implies not only physical modification; it also accommodates the “possibility of replacing old inherent instincts by new suggestions, grafting upon or replacing the inherited fixed ideas” (90).

These arguments reappear in a chapter situated almost precisely halfway through *Moreau* entitled “Dr. Moreau Explains.”²⁰ Lecturing Prendick on his experiments, Moreau claims to be “the first man” to approach the question “of the plasticity of living forms” with “a really scientific knowledge of the laws of growth,” although it was Wells who, a year before his readers met Moreau, had already argued that “a growing perfection in the knowledge of the laws of growth” made “credible” the “moulding of the commonplace individual into the beautiful or the grotesque” (*Works* 2:89–90; “Limits” 90).²¹ The aesthetic terminology is common to both essay and chapter (Wells refers to the speculative techniques as an “artistic treatment of living things”; Moreau claims his own attempts to make men out of beasts “appeals to the artistic turn of mind”) and is one of the most notable parallels between the

¹⁹ The article was printed the month the first instalment of *The Time Machine* appeared in W. E. Henley’s *New Review*.

²⁰ An endpaper in the 1896 first edition plays on the relationship between essay and chapter: “This is the only portion of this story that has been previously published, and it has been entirely recast to adapt it to the narrative form” (*Moreau* [1896] n.p.; suppressed in Atlantic Edition). The trope recurs elsewhere. Wells’s narrator in *The War of the Worlds* refers to an article, “in a long-defunct publication” written by “a certain speculative writer of quasi-scientific repute,” which argued that as humanity continued to evolve mechanical contrivances “must ultimately supersede limbs” and that “[w]hile the rest of the body dwindled, the hands would grow larger”; the text is Wells’s own “The Man of the Year Million” printed in the *Pall Mall Gazette* for 6 November 1893 (*Works* 3:380). Later, Wells’s narrator refers to his forthcoming “paper on the probable development of the civilising process,” possibly a reference to Wells’s own *Fortnightly* article on “Morals and Civilisation” (3:445). Chapter XXI in *The First Men in the Moon* commences with Bedford’s remarks on the publication of “the greater portion” on his narrative in the *Strand Magazine*, where Wells serialised the book (*Works* 6:211).

²¹ The action of *The Island of Dr. Moreau* takes place in 1887 so Moreau enjoys priority by a chronological technicality. See the “Introduction” to the narrative supplied by Prendick’s nephew (*Moreau* [1896] v). The “Introduction” is suppressed in the Atlantic reprinting, but the text there cites a report on the loss of the *Lady Vain* in the “*Daily News*, March 17, 1887” (2:3).

texts, which both invoke Victor Hugo's *L'Homme Qui Rit* (1869) for the novel's depiction of the deliberate disfigurement of children (*Works* 2:90–91; "Limits" 90). Both the *Saturday* essay and the later fictional treatment draw an analogy between art and surgical experimentation.

However, where the *Saturday* essay confidently postulates mental "modification" by such a process, Moreau is more circumspect ("Limits" 90). He asserts that artistic objectives are facile compared with what really constitutes the distinction between man and beast. Obtaining "human shape" is simple, Moreau says; but "the subtle grafting and reshaping one must needs do to the brain" is a far greater problem (*Works* 2:98). This is a rephrasing of Wells's claim in the *Saturday* article on "Plasticity" regarding the "possibility of replacing old inherent instincts by new suggestions, grafting upon or replacing the inherited fixed ideas" ("Limits" 90). The terms of reference relate also to Wells's claim in his *Fortnightly* article on "Human Evolution" that social progress consists in "an evolution of suggestions and ideas" (590).²² For Moreau, this represents the threshold beyond which the analogy between art and science collapses. The disanalogy treats ironically the idea that artistic and cognitive objectives may coincide.

The concluding episode of the book makes clear that Prendick's narrative is not an example of constructive response to socio-moral questions but of withdrawal from them. When Prendick returns to London hoping to rediscover "the sweet and wholesome intercourse of men" he craves after almost a year's absence, he discovers instead vestiges of the bestial behaviour of Moreau's "travesty of humanity" in the city's inhabitants, "animals half-wrought into the outward image of human souls," and secludes himself in scientific study (2:99, 124, 170). Prendick's conclusion—that it is "in the vast and eternal laws of nature, and not in the daily cares and sins and troubles of men, that whatever is more than animal within us must find its solace and its hope"—not only mirrors Moreau's scientific isolation, it abandons the narrative in moral limbo (2:172). For Wells the socio-moral commitment of the artist resides in understanding and dealing with the "conflict between instinct and injunction," which is how he describes the premise of the book in his preface to the Atlantic Edition; Prendick's withdrawal into study cannot be reconciled to this view (2:ix).²³ But it is

²² See Chapter 3, pp. 139–40.

²³ A metaphor Prendick uses earlier in the book to describe his experience is instructive. Reflecting on "the painful disorder" he witnesses on the island he "loses his faith in the sanity of the world"; he attributes such disorder not to Moreau's surgical interference but to cosmic indifference: "a blind fate, a vast pitiless mechanism, seemed to cut and shape the fabric of existence" (2:123). His interpretation implies that such indifference may not be overcome by man, and is at odds with Wells's constructive

the use of chromatic metaphor in descriptive scenes that first raises the question of the possibility of a constructive response to cognitive challenge and novel moral attitudes. Prendick ultimately withdraws from social engagement into scientific study, but not before composing an account of his tenacious attempt to impose aesthetic order upon his recollections of Moreau's island.

Cardinal points and lost orientations

In this section I examine Wells's use of spatial and orienting metaphors in *Love and Mr. Lewisham* and *Kipps*. With *Kipps* in particular, Wells uses spatial metaphor to develop character in terms of the individual-type distinction that he outlined in the *Saturday*.²⁴ As in

conception of social progress.

²⁴ Some consideration might also be given the explicit articulation of the figurative strategy that most often recurs in Wells's social theorising. Passages in *Anticipations*, "The Discovery of the Future," *Mankind in the Making*, and the "Digression About Novels" in Wells's *Experiment in Autobiography* present a theory of the contemporary state of socio-moral affairs in which Wells contrasts the rigid social stratification of earlier centuries with the pervasive disorientation that, in Wells's view, defines modernity. He variously describes a "process of deliquescence" subsequent to the collapse of "the old order," a new "melted and mingled" class order comprising "a vast intricate confusion" of individuals "swimming successfully without aid," "clinging to the floating rich," or "thrust and sinking down"; a "floating uncertainty" in moral, aesthetic, religious, and political questions, opposed to moral codes derived from "some dogmatic injunction" of traditional and "established morality"; the breakdown of a now irrelevant "logical moral code" whose "separated spars float here and there"; a "rigid frame of values" that has disintegrated into a "splintering frame" with repercussions for novelists (*Anticipations* 82–84, 103; "Discovery" 326–27; *Mankind* 300; *Experiment* 494–95). (See Chapter 2, pp. 78–80.) Wells considered *Tono-Bungay* (1909) his "finest and most finished novel upon the accepted lines"; it is also the work that most explicitly adopts the salient assumptions of his socio-moral theory and its metaphorical exposition (*Works* 12:ix). George Ponderevo, the book's protagonist and first-person narrator, diagnoses the modern age as one "perpetually seeking after lost orientations"; he observes that "all the organising ideas have slackened, the old habitual bonds have relaxed or altogether come undone"; he wonders whether his "case was the case of many men, whether in former ages men had been so guideless, so uncharted, so haphazard in their journey into life," or if it is only George Ponderevo who feels "like a man floundering in a universe of soapsuds, up and down, east and west"; he worries that England's "commercial civilisation" is no more than "a swelling, a thinning bubble of assurances . . . that it all drifts on to some tremendous parallel" to his uncle's eventual bankruptcy and demise; he depicts the London unemployed as a "shambling, shameful stream . . . oozing along the street, the gutter waste of competitive civilisation" while "modern financiers of change and bluff . . . try to make their fluid opulence coagulate out as bricks and mortar"; and, finally, "this immense process of social disorganisation in which we live" as "a thing adrift, a fruitless thing broken away from its connections" (*Works* 12:19, 268, 271–72, 297, 310, 507). But the deliquescence metaphor is no late arrival in Wells's fiction. In *The War of the Worlds* (1898), the terror that precedes the arrival of the Martians in London demolishes the existing social decorum. Wells's narrator notes the collapse of law and order in terms akin to those that would define the figurative strategy of his later social analysis: "So you understand the roaring wave of fear that swept through the greatest city in the world just as Monday was dawning—the stream of flight rising swiftly to a torrent, lashing in a foaming tumult round the railway stations, banked up into a horrible struggle about the shipping in the Thames, and hurrying every available channel northward and eastward. By ten o'clock the police organisation, and by mid-day even the railway organisations, were losing coherency, losing shape and efficiency, guttering, softening, running at last in that swift liquefaction of the social body" (*Works* 3:331). See also

the previous section, my general claim is that to understand Wells's fiction is to come to grips with his figurations. It is in the relationship between plot, character, and metaphor that Wells seeks the "unity of effect" he favoured in his own reading.

It is through the use of spatial metaphors and metaphors of orientation that Wells is able to explore the relationship between type and individual that he had endorsed in the *Saturday* as essential to the social-realist novel. There, Wells defined character as "type" in terms of the depiction of believable "individuals living under the full stress of this great social force or that" and claimed that the key technical issue for novelists was to establish a kind of narrative perspective that would reveal the relationship between characters and social forces ("Novel of Types" 23).²⁵ Here I examine key examples of Wells's figurations in *Lewisham* and *Kipps* to show that spatial and orienting metaphors provide the technical basis for his exploration of the relationship between characters and social forces and, by extension, his depiction of character as "type."

Wells's first attempt at a social-realist novel "along the lines that he had laid down for himself in his *Saturday* reviewing," *Love and Mr. Lewisham* is the story of Lewisham's progress from misplaced adolescent ambitions for a stellar scientific career and a political position, to reconciliation with the realities of married life (Ray, "H. G. Wells Tries" 122). The choices Lewisham must make between "that shining staircase to fame and power that had been his dream from the very dawn of his adolescence, and on the other hand—Ethel" are defined in spatial terms (*Works* 7:364).

Before they marry, Lewisham and Ethel are reacquainted after a period of estrangement when Lewisham encounters Ethel assisting her stepfather Chaffery in a sham séance. (She is also employed as typist to Lagune, an "ardent spiritualist" and Chaffery's associate, as well as a frequent interloper at the Royal College of Science at South Kensington, where Lewisham is studying for his diploma: 7:319.) Lewisham accompanies Ethel as she walks home to Clapham along London's "cold grey" streets (7:337). Embarrassed by her discovery, Ethel is reluctant to engage in conversation; her concession to Lewisham that he may accompany her "part of the way" obtains metaphorical significance as Wells uses elements of the urban setting to resonate with the state of his characters' relationship (7:337). When Ethel reveals she knew Chaffery was a cheat, the conversation enters "a silence that it seemed would never

Masterman's speech in *Kipps*, pp. 174–75 below.

²⁵ See Chapter 3, pp. 126–29 above.

end”; it lapses again when they turn into the King’s Road, “with its roar of wheeled traffic and hurrying foot-passengers, and forthwith a crowd of boys with a broken-spirited Guy involved and separated them” (7:339). Features of setting possess both descriptive and figurative functions here; the obstacles to private conversation are at once environmental and psychological. When Ethel rebuffs Lewisham’s entreaties by observing that “[l]ife is hard enough as it is,” and demands that he “must go back at the end of the road,” Wells transitions from a literal to a figurative treatment of the situation in order to indicate the significance of the episode:

Lewisham made no reply for a hundred yards. “I’m coming on to Clapham,” he said.
They came to the end of the road in silence. Then at the kerb corner she turned and faced him. “Go back,” she whispered.
“No,” he said obstinately, and they stood face to face at the cardinal point of their lives.
(7:340)

For Wells’s protagonist, the “cardinal point,” a term punctuating the accumulating spatial metaphors of the episode, represents one in a series of choices between false and true conceptions and associated modes of living: it is Lewisham’s destiny in the book to be repeatedly estranged and reconciled to Ethel, at the cost of abandoning his dream of careers in science and politics (which are unlikely anyway).²⁶ The episode is a good example of Wells’s use in *Lewisham* of description to support theme; the spatial relationships and the journey through London’s streets on foot are the metaphorical vehicle by which Wells explores the circumstances of his characters’ relationship and reveals the thematic issues at stake.²⁷

Lewisham shows how Wells explores the relationship between character and social context using both chromatic and spatial figurations. With *Kipps*, Wells again explores relationships between his characters’ thought processes or emotional states and elements of their surroundings. However, particularly in those parts of the novel that deal with the consequences of Kipps inheriting a house and twelve-hundred pounds a year from an estranged relative, Wells begins to explore more fully the possibilities of spatial and orienting

²⁶ “Summarized in the most abstract terms, *Love and Mr. Lewisham* tells of a young man’s progress from error to truth. It shows George Edgar Lewisham gradually shedding his false beliefs—shedding them arduously and unwillingly, with much backsliding and agonizing—but eventually accepting the truth about . . . his abilities, and his feelings. . . . The truth about his abilities is that they are, after all, undistinguished. And the truth about his feelings is that he does, after all, love his wife Ethel” (Newell 13).

²⁷ Elsewhere Lewisham conceives of his and Ethel’s situations as a “dead lane” with marriage the only escape: “You must come out of your cheating, and I must come out of my cramming. And we—we must marry” (7:384).

metaphors as a way of engaging critically with social context. The two episodes discussed below illustrate the technique.

Before leaving home at the age of fourteen to commence his apprenticeship at the Folkestone Drapery Bazaar, Kipps is inspired by “a paragraph called ‘Lovers’ Tokens’ that he read in a torn fragment of *Tit-Bits*” to exchange “a divided sixpence” with Ann, sister to Kipps’s childhood friend Sid Pornick (*Works* 8:27). Later he forgets Ann and falls in love with Helen Walshingham, whom he meets at a wood-carving class and, after inheriting his fortune, engages to marry. The first episode I examine occurs in Chapter VI (entitled “Discords”) of Book II. On a ride from Folkestone to New Romney “to break the news of his engagement to his uncle and aunt—positively,” Kipps chances upon Ann while walking his bicycle “just outside New Romney preparatory to his triumphal entry (one hand off)” (8:267). The episode is narrated mainly from Kipps’s perspective and includes a series of contrasts of Folkestone with New Romney, largely unfavourable to the former. For example, while already thinking about Ann before encountering her, Kipps’s mind wanders to other “curious things”:

whether, after all, the atmosphere of New Romney and the Marsh had not some difference, some faint impalpable quality that was missing in the great and fashionable world of Folkestone behind there on the hill. Here there was a homeliness, a familiarity. He had noted as he passed that old Mr. Clifferdown’s gate had been mended with a fresh piece of string. In Folkestone he didn’t take notice and he didn’t care if they built three hundred houses. (8:267)

The mental corollary of Kipps’s physical distance from Folkestone is an ambivalent and somewhat attenuated estimation of “the great and fashionable world” it represents. He turns to thinking of the holidays he enjoyed roaming the hinterland and the coast with Sid—“[a]ll those things were over now”—and encounters Ann, “as pretty as she had promised to be,” her face “alight to Kipps with her artless gladness at their encounter” (8:268–69). Kipps decides not to tell her about “his great fortune” (an earlier encounter with Sid, now a socialist, in which Kipps reveals his change in status ends with Sid’s disapproval and a new alienation in their friendship); instead they make small-talk while walking to the village (8:269). Physical alternatives *en route* mirror Kipps’s dawning sense of alternative and mutually exclusive modes of life:

Presently they came to the bifurcation of the roads.

“I’m going down this way to mother’s cottage,” said Ann.

“I’ll come a bit your way if I may.”

In New Romney social distinctions that are primary realities in Folkestone are absolutely non-existent, and it seemed quite permissible for him to walk with Ann, for all that she was no more than a servant. (8:269–70)

The implication that in Folkestone Kipps’s behaviour would be met with censure reveals

what is at stake in making a choice between Ann and Helen—and between one side of the fork in the road or the other. Kipps takes advantage of his distance from Folkestone to negate the considerations of propriety, but his decision to continue on with Ann brings the episode to crisis. Wells plays on the effects of Ann's desirability and physical closeness:

All and more than all of those first emotions of his adolescence had come back to him. Her presence banished a multitude of countervailing considerations. It was Ann more than ever. She stood breathing close to him with her soft-looking lips a little apart and gladness in her eyes. . . . He would have liked to have had a long talk to her, to have gone for a walk with her or something, to have drawn nearer to her in any conceivable way, and, above all, to have had some more of the appreciation that shone in her eyes, but a vestige of Folkestone still clinging to him told him it "wouldn't do." "Well," he said, "I must be getting on," and turned away reluctantly, with a will under compulsion . . . (8:271–72)

Here the spatial metaphors transition from the positing of geographical alternatives with incompatible social and emotional implications, to a sense of increasing constraint associated with Kipps's gathering recognition that he must meet extant obligations: New Romney and Folkestone no longer posit social alternatives for the sake of merely complacent deliberation. In addition to arousing "[e]xtraordinary impulses" in "neglected parts" of his being, Ann's proximity to Kipps has figurative implications (8:271). For at this moment Kipps sees his position, that he is caught between desire for his childhood sweetheart and the expectations of his fiancée and middle-class Folkestone entourage. His strategy in resolving the crisis is merely to delay it. Sensing his entrapment he submits passively to the social etiquette of Folkestone. His acquiescence takes the form of his departure from Ann and a perfunctory exchange with his uncle—they discuss "the usual topics" and Kipps forgets to mention his engagement to Helen—before he commences the return journey (8:272). From this point in the episode onward, Kipps's meditations upon the romantic possibilities of New Romney are constrained by propriety—and his competence as a cyclist. Wells continues to explore Kipps's comprehension of the various factors involved through the use of spatial metaphor:

The south-west wind perhaps helped him back There came an odd effect as he drew near Hythe. The hills on the left and the trees on the right seemed to draw together and close in upon him until his way was straight and narrow. He could not turn round on that treacherous, half-tamed machine, but he knew that behind him, he knew so well, spread the wide vast flatness of the Marsh shining under the afternoon sky. In some way this was material for his thoughts. And as he rode through Hythe he came upon the idea that there was a considerable amount of incompatibility between the existence of one who was practically a gentleman and of Ann. (8:272–73)

All of New Romney and its hinterland now lie behind Kipps and remain beyond his purview. His glib rationalisation—his social incompatibility with Ann—is no more than a wilful acquiescence in his recovered sense of social propriety, and is surely meant ironically by Wells: it is clear from events immediately preceding that Kipps and Ann are anything but

incompatible. Indeed it is precisely the “homeliness” and “familiarity” Ann represents that are “missing in the great and fashionable world of Folkestone” (8:267).

The figurative implications of the “odd effect” as landscape conspires to emphasise the straitening of Kipps’s thoughts and actions as he approaches Hythe (and Folkestone beyond it) has significance not only within this episode but for the figurative structure of the book generally. It echoes an earlier remark by Minton, a senior apprentice at the Folkestone Drapery Bazaar. Reflecting upon the draper’s lot and the futility of escaping the dreariness of retail trade, Minton protests: “it can’t be done. You got to stick to cribs until it’s over. I tell you we’re in a blessed drainpipe, and we’ve got to crawl along it till we die” (8:50). The remark brings home to Kipps “the thing that had happened to him—how the great stupid machine of retail trade had caught his life into its wheels, a vast irresistible force which he had neither strength of will nor knowledge to escape,” excluding among other things any “dream of effectual love and marriage” (8:50–51). Kipps’s inheritance is his ticket out of retail, but he has substituted instruction in the social proprieties suitable to a gentleman, a life curtailed by codes obscure to and unnavigable by him, and a vague sense that the woman he desires most is unavailable to him socially, for “cribs.” By the same measure as Kipps’s options appear increasingly constrained, he is ever more disoriented from his origins and all that is good in New Romney.

Kipps eventually determines to refute Minton’s thesis; he deserts Helen Walshingham and elopes to London with Ann to be married. Masterman, a socialist intellectual who rents Sid Pornick’s front room, sanctions Kipps’s decision to abandon his engagement to the middle-class Helen, to marry his equal (Ann) and make his own way in life.²⁸ Masterman’s speech to Kipps mocks the authority of the social matrix Kipps struggles to inhabit, the “complex and difficult social system” through which the couple now flees “as it were for life” (8:359). Here Wells’s figurative strategy plays on the contrast not between geographically and socially opposed locales, but between Masterman’s conception of a disintegrating social order and the possibility of taking one’s “own line” as the sole meaningful alternative (8:360). He is not surprised Kipps found “the Higher Life a bit difficult”:

You were starting a climb . . . that doesn’t lead anywhere. You would have clambered from one refinement of vulgarity to another and never got to any satisfactory top. There isn’t a top. It’s a squirrel’s cage. Things are out of joint, and the only top there is is a lot of blazing card-playing women and betting men seasoned with archbishops and officials and all that sort of glossy,

²⁸ Masterman, “a dying socialist intellectual . . . voices Wells’s opinions” (Ray, “H. G. Wells Tries” 133). Newell similarly describes Masterman as “Wells’s spokesman” in *Kipps* (55).

pandering Tosh . . . You'd have hung on, a disconsolate, dismal little figure, somewhere up the ladder, far below even the motor-car class, while your wife larked about—or fretted because she wasn't a bit higher than she was. . . . Anyhow, you're doing the right and sane thing, and that's a rare spectacle. You're going to marry your equal, and you're going to take your own line, quite independently of what people up there, or people down there, think you ought or ought not to do. That's about the only course one can take nowadays with everything getting more muddled and upside-down every day. Make your own little world and your own house first of all, keep that right side up whatever you do, and marry your mate. (8:359–60).

The London episode represents a transition from spatial metaphors signifying constraint, disorientation, and crisis to those endorsing the desirability and suggesting the possibility of escape. Masterman's diagnosis of the future Kipps as a "dismal little figure" rings true in the context of an earlier depiction of London's "multitudinous swarming" streets and Kipps's recognition of his entrapment in one "vast irresistible force" or another (8:50, 359). The impression is of a kind of imperious indifference to the individual on the part of existing forms of social stratification. It takes the form of two competing orienting metaphors, the independent "line" Masterman perceives Kipps opting for, and the "squirrel's cage," the "muddled and upside-down" modern socio-moral environment.²⁹

Kipps is a social-realist novel of the kind Wells endorses in his *Saturday* reviewing, for its protagonist is both type and individual. Relating Kipps's struggle to escape various modes of social constraint imposed by the complex class system of contemporary England, the novel depicts Kipps "living under the full stress" of a "great social force" ("Novel of Types" 23). Wells's deployment of spatial metaphor in passages of scenic description explores the relationship between character and social force in figurative terms and from the perspective of character. Wells presents a "living, breathing" individual in Kipps, but Kipps is more than an individual in the commonplace sense ("Novel of Types" 23). For Wells shows Kipps discovering how to make his own way in life, to escape the constraints of social codes and the shame of never being able to master or embody them—to take his own line, to be an individual in the sense of acting decisively and independently of those codes.

Romances and novels

Both *Moreau* and *Kipps* show how Wells explored themes arising from his social theory

²⁹ Masterman's speech to Kipps when they first meet contains similar figurative elements: "people think there is a class or order somewhere, just above them or just below them . . . The fact is, Society is one body . . . This society we live in is ill. . . . There's big and little men mixed up together, that's all. None of us know where we are. . . . Your smart society is as low and vulgar and uncomfortable for a balanced soul as a gin palace, no more and no less; there's no place or level of honour or fine living left in the world; so what's the good of climbing? . . . This world is out of joint" (8:307–09). And Wells's protagonist in *Lewisham* also "takes his line" in response to what he perceives for most of the book as the impossibility of resolving mutually exclusive life objectives, career and love (7:505).

and his conception of the social role of fiction. I have suggested that *Moreau* can be read as a critique of the social efficacy of art, articulating the sceptical view Wells reached on this question around the time his tenure as head fiction reviewer for the *Saturday* was drawing to a close, a view that would continue to find expression in *Anticipations* and “The Discovery of the Future,” but which Wells abandoned in *Mankind in the Making* for a more constructive social conception of the novel. *Kipps* shows Wells exploring character in the social-realist terms he outlined in his reviewing; examining the relationship between character and setting to demonstrate the effect of social forces on character, Wells treats character as both “type” and “individual” in the sense outlined in his article on “The Novel of Types” (23).

A more detailed study of Wells’s fiction is required before drawing conclusions about the development of his treatment, in fiction, of the themes arising from his social theorising. Though it was only with *Anticipations* that Wells began to develop an explicit sociology, he had already begun, in *Love and Mr. Lewisham*, to study the relationship between individuals and social forces. Accordingly, the hypothesis behind such a study might be that Wells’s fiction both guides and mirrors developments in his sociological thinking. This would test the view suggested here, that the sceptical attitude toward the social efficacy of art in *Moreau*, anticipating the views Wells formulates in the *Fortnightly* articles, the introductory passages of *Anticipations*, and “The Discovery of the Future,” makes way for a fuller realisation of the constructive conception of the novel in *Kipps*. Such a study would draw together Wells’s thoughts on technique in the novel, the theory of character as “type” formulated in his *Saturday* reviewing, with such ideas in *Mankind in the Making* that the novel is to be an experiment in ways of living, as well as the discoveries Wells makes in his fictional practice about the relationship between individuals and the forces, structures, and ideas comprising social experience. A sense, at least, of this wider relationship between doctrinal conception and fictional practice emerges from the material examined in this chapter; it suggests further that a more detailed study might explore this relationship in terms of Wells’s figurative structures, for it is these that comprise the technical basis for the articulation of social themes in his fiction.

Conclusions

The aim of this thesis is to challenge Ray's finding that Wells formulates in his reviews for the *Saturday* a conception of "the novel proper" in the "special sense, the high sense in which it was used by James and Conrad," free of the functional, utilitarian, sociological objectives of his later views (Ray, "H. G. Wells Tries" 107, 109). I have challenged Ray's finding by arguing that Wells's 1911 lecture on "The Contemporary Novel" represents the clearest formulation of his artistic preferences (Chapter 1), before showing how the formulation developed in the context of contemporary sociological and philosophical debates after the turn of the century (Chapter 2). In both chapters, I argued that Wells defends the novel as a means for exploring the relationship between individuals and social forces. Such is the criterion Ray holds to be characteristic of the conception of the novel Wells developed in the *Saturday*, his "insistence on representing great social issues through individual histories" (Ray 118). In other words, Ray's criterion does not distinguish the reviewing from Wells's later explicit statements of artistic preferences. Instead, I have suggested the more accurate view is to see in the development of Wells's conception of the novel not a purely artistic conception that declines to something more functional, instrumental, or sociological after the turn of the century, but a consistent attempt to integrate aesthetic values and social objectives. I have argued that the *Saturday* reviews themselves do not present the purely artistic conception Ray suggests. Examining Wells's reviewing in Chapter 3, I showed that he used Poe's concept of "unity of effect" to defend the possibility of instrumental social objectives in the novel, that his discussion of perspective in the novel is similarly allied to social objectives, and that Wells's preference for social realism in the novel is predicated upon a theory of social evolution holding that social progress is a cognitive or intellectual matter, with novels a kind of intervention or motive force in social evolution. In short, Wells's attempt to integrate aesthetic and social notions in his reviews undermines Ray's argument that Wells's reviewing for the *Saturday* represents an artistic conception free of the functional, sociological objectives of later formulations. From 25 May 1895, when the *Saturday* printed his review on Jonas Lie's *One of Life's Slaves*, to 18 May 1911, when the Times Book Club heard his lecture on the scope of contemporary fiction, Wells articulates a consistent ideal for the novel, one in which aesthetic principles are allied to statements about social objectives.

There are collateral implications for the prevailing view in existing criticism on Wells, finding that the adoption of sociological objectives affected his artistic productions for the

worse, sometime after the turn of the century. Here I consider West's and Bergonzi's views in particular. Both argue that Wells's artistic decline commenced with the publication of *Anticipations*. For Bergonzi, *Anticipations* is where one finds Wells "ceasing to be an artist" (*Early H. G. Wells* 21). West finds the book to mark the commencement of a decades-long betrayal of Wells's imagination (56).¹ It appears significant to me that it is the book Wells commences by rejecting fiction as a means of social analysis that West and Bergonzi isolate as the turning point in his career. It is, of course, the first in a series of sociological books for which Wells expended creative energy in non-fictional pursuits. However, his rejection of fiction in *Anticipations*, both in choice of genre and in the argument for a kind of methodological dualism, is not the watershed West and Bergonzi make it out to be. For one thing, as a writer, Wells was many-faceted before he wrote *Anticipations*. The 1890s saw him trying his hand at drama and fiction reviews, scientific articles and essays, and quasi-sociological reflection in his *Fortnightly* articles on "Human Evolution" and "Morals and Civilisation." There, he first voiced a sceptical attitude on the possibility of substantive social effects in literature, almost four years before the explicit renunciation in *Anticipations*. Furthermore, *Anticipations*, like the *Fortnightly* articles, reveals a writer judging the state of the art from the vantage point of a clearly-articulated and consistent set of artistic principles. Wells's critique of contemporary literature, for failing to meet the social obligations he held to be essential to the occupation of novelist, is consistent with the conception of the novel outlined in the *Saturday*: the positive conception was easily converted into a tool of critique. And his experience as reviewer no doubt provided some assurance that he could criticise the state of the art without ceasing to be an artist. To find that Wells abandoned art altogether with *Anticipations* is to deny validity to his conception of art for reasons other than a lack of consistency or conviction; finding he betrayed his imagination is to superimpose on his artistic practice an alien set of principles. Not only in the explicit statements on the nature and purpose of the novel made in his non-fiction but, as I explored in Chapter 4, in his own practice, Wells's artistic principles are allied to social objectives; *Anticipations* was his attempt to approach these objectives by other means.

To the question of how Wells's conception of the function and purpose of the novel relates to other developments in the history of twentieth-century literary criticism, only a provisional response may be given here in the absence of detailed study of Wells's place in

¹ See the thesis Introduction for a summary of views on Wells's artistic decline.

this history. The attempt to find signs of “an early and typically democratic New Critic” in Wells’s *Saturday* reviewing, especially in his pronouncement that the critic “analyse a work as though it stood alone in the world,” seems to me mistaken (Dessner 121; Wells, “Certain Critical Opinions” 33). This is surely readily apparent if, for the sake of avoiding a recapitulation of the various points of view that the term accommodates, one takes “the New Criticism” to represent at least in part a broad distinction between “intrinsic” and “extrinsic” matters in the favour of the former, isolating the work from biography, psychology, other forms of artistic practice, and general theories about society and ideas. Considered in such terms, Wells’s literary criticism represents the converse view; it has been the burden of this thesis to demonstrate that he consistently supports his views on critical matters pertaining to the text and how to read it, with the question of relationships between text and author, text and society, author and society, and so on. Indeed where Wells comes closest to drawing a methodological distinction between artistic matters and broad social questions, in the opening passage of *Anticipations*, the consequences are entirely negative for his view on the estimable qualities of art.

Nevertheless, the question is pertinent because it highlights the tension in Wells’s thoughts on the novel between conceiving of the form as something *sui generis* and, conversely, conceiving of it in terms of its various intergeneric negotiations with biography and autobiography—between such arguments in “The Contemporary Novel” that the novel possesses a “power of veracity” transcending the “superficial fact” of biography and autobiography, thereby making it “the only medium” capable of engaging constructively with contemporary social issues, and such claims in the “Digression About Novels” that “[e]very ‘living’ character in a novel . . . is filched from biography . . . and its actions are a reflection upon moral conduct” (“The Contemporary Novel” 869, 872; *Experiment* 493). In fact, Wells’s defence of the novel in the 1911 lecture, commencing with his claim that Sterne, a practitioner of the autobiographical form, is “the greatest *artist* . . . that Great Britain has ever produced in all that is essentially the novel,” begs the question of what precisely the relationship consists of, not just between Wells’s own digressional tendencies in fiction (which are, anyway, far less severe than Sterne’s) but between novel and biography (“The Contemporary Novel” 864).

Despite this backwards-looking justification of his own craft, Wells is hardly conservative in his approach to the novel. Iconoclastic is the better term, given his rejection in contemporary practice of what he terms “Academic” criticism, as well as his rejection of

popular romance and the entire Scott tradition. Of course, with such remarks Wells is situating himself historically, identifying his enemies, shoring up his position with an appeal to such giants of the novel as Sterne, placing himself within an eminent literary lineage. While “The Contemporary Novel” represents the clearest articulation of Wells’s conception of the novel’s nature and purpose, it also reveals the tension inherent in his explicit attempts at situating himself and formulating his position. By 1911 his attempt to conceive of the novelist’s craft as one preeminently concerned with “personality,” as it applies to both author and character, had earned Wells censure not only by James but by other critics accusing him of turning his own life into books. Considered in these terms, it becomes clear that Wells’s attempt to situate his own practice in relation to historical models like Sterne’s, at the same time asserting generic discontinuity between the novel and biography or autobiography, is conditioned by three key factors: a literary-historical justification for his approach, the desire to answer his critics (and prove their starting assumptions wrong), and the development of his theory about how the novel engages directly with ideas and social forces.

By 1934, when *Experiment in Autobiography* appeared, the literary landscape had changed, and Wells’s approach to defending his craft changed with it. The “Digression” represents a new approach, asserting in more positive terms the intergeneric relationship between biography and the novel. It seems possible—given the contradictions and reversals in the “Digression” which imply that the issue remained somewhat an anxious one for Wells—that his declaration that all novels are biographical, at least in terms of characterisation, is an attempt not only to distance himself from James but to negotiate his position in relation to contemporary novelists who employed autobiographical approaches to narrative without encountering the same degree of censure Wells suffered at the hands of his critics. Understanding the development of Wells’s conception of the novel, as he formulated it in explicit pronouncements on the novel in his non-fiction, is part of coming to terms with his relationship with contemporary literary and intellectual culture. However, a study of Wells’s fiction, commencing from the findings I have presented regarding the nature of his social-aesthetic conception, and comparing his practice to that of such novelists as Woolf, Joyce, Nabokov, and others who adopt the biographical or autobiographical approach, would shed further and much-needed light on Wells’s place in the history of the novel.

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